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The Vespucci Family in Context: Art Patrons in Late Fifteenth-Century Florence

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PhD History of Art

The University of Edinburgh

2014

Abstract

The study of Florentine artistic patronage has attracted several approaches over the last three decades, including the exploration of patron-client structures and how the use of art in private and public spheres contributed to shape families's identity. Building on past research, this work focuses on the art patronage of a prominent, yet overlooked, family, the Vespucci, to whom Amerigo, the navigator who reached the coasts of America in the late fifteenth century, belonged. Although the family's importance was achieved through a synergy of political, religious and intellectual forces, attention is given to the Vespucci's engagement with the arts and their key contribution to Florence's humanistic culture between the years 1470-1500.

The family's houses and private chapels are analysed, and three artists, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Piero di Cosimo, considered. Combining history, art history, and archival resources, new evidence and interpretations are advanced to ascribe selected artworks - controversially believed to be Vespucci commissions - to the private patronage of this Florentine family. Examining the Vespucci's artistic taste in private and public settings, whilst attempting a reconstruction of partially lost painted commissions, deepens comprehension on the role that domestic and social life played in the creation of art and culture; the family's force in shaping spaces; and the practice of buying, commissioning, and displaying as a means of signifying wealth, increasing status, and establishing identity. Power seekers, the Vespucci entered the Medici intellectual circles through which they created chains of friendship with prominent families inside and outside of Florence. As questions about shared artistic tastes and the paradigmatic role of the Medici artistic patronage have been the focus of scholarly enquiry, this study of the Vespucci provides an insight into the family's spreading of new ideas and its interaction with the development of the visual arts. Investigation into the Vespucci's breadth of interests helps to reframe the current knowledge of Florentine cultural exchanges and to contextualise the family's influence beyond the geographical discoveries it has been exclusively associated with.

Declaration

I confirm that the work presented in this thesis is all my own work, and it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Date:

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Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my current and past supervisors, Jill Burke, David Howarth and Carol Richardson. A special must be reserved for Jill, who has guided me throughout my PhD: it is with her help, support, and encouragement that I have been able to grow and develop academically. Thank you for helping me to realise the meaning of “scientific” and “feasible”, and for teaching me how to write successful funding applications. A mention also goes to The University of Edinburgh and the Department of History of Art in particular, for showing me what it means to be part of a stimulating and international academic community.

This project could have not been completed without the help of many people. Jill Burke, Cecilia Hewlett, David Rosenthal, and Stephen Bowd all assisted me in reading my very first few documents in the Florence Archivio di Stato. The staff of the Medici Archive Project took over from them and I know I gave some hard times to Elena Brizio, Alessio Assonitis and Roberta Piccinelli during the paleography courses I attended. I am grateful to those who were generous enough to share their thoughts and material with me - either in person or by email: the *amici* of the Comitato Amerigo Vespucci a Casa Sua, in particular Maurizio Maggini; Chiara Cappuccini of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure and Simone Vettori; Marco Accorti; Rinaldo Nicoli Aldini; Judith Allan; Frances Andrews; Davide Baldi; Nicoletta Baldini; Marco Barbattini; Francesco Guidi Bruscoli; Jean Cadogan; Caroline Campbell; Ariel Castro; Lauri Cirri; Emanuela Daffra; Francesca Funis; Padre Fortunato Iozzelli; Stuart Ivinson; Allan Grieco; Rachel King; Yoko Kishida; Andrea Maiarelli; Monica Manzoni; Simona di Marco; Julia Miller; Jonathan Nelson; Arnold Nesselrath; Nerida Newbiggin; Henri Noltie; Antonio Palesati; Eleonora Plebani; Andrew Polaszek; Jean-Luc Renneson; Lucia Ricciardi; Antonio Rollo; Rita Romanelli; Elisabetta Scarton; Karl Schlebusch; Sharon Strocchia; Tony Sullivan; Francesco Surdich; Laurie Taylor-Mitchell; Sergio Tognetti; Patrizia Urbani; Chet van Duzer; John Wickstrom; and Alana White, and everyone else I might have forgotten.

I am also grateful to the staff of the Library of Congress, as well as those of the libraries and archives of Florence: the Archivio di Stato; the Biblioteca Nazionale; the Biblioteca Laurenziana; the Dutch Institute of Art; the Kunsthistorisches Institut; I Tatti; and the Istituto di Studi Rinascimentali. A warm thank you goes to the Dutch Institute of Art where Michael Kwakkelstein, Gert Jan van der Sman, Tjarda, and Ilaria Masi offered me ideal accommodation on many occasions. The friendly, relaxed, and inspiring atmosphere of the Institute makes it one of the best places to research.

The investigation undertaken on the Vespucci family would have not been possible without the financial support I received from different sources that enabled me to pursue research in Italy and the United States. I am grateful for the Edinburgh Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies grants, the William Dickson Travel Fund, the Francis Haskell Memorial Fund Scholarship, the Edinburgh College of Art Scholarship, and the two-month Fellowship at the Dutch Institute of Art of Florence.

My parents, Giovanna and Vincenzo, welcomed my decision to embark on this three-year project and accepted my choice of studying and living abroad. Their emotional support has always compensated for the physical distance.

A further note is for all my Edinburgh-based PhD fellows with whom this academic adventure started, and for my flatmates, Michele in particular. In the past years I have had the privilege of meeting many special people I am glad to be able to call friends: Joanne Allen; Leilani Alotanga; Klazina Botke; Jennifer Halton; Nina Lamal; Hannah Meinshausen; Tania de Nile; the fabulous Sturniolo-Pryde couple; Camilla Riva Fifer without whose incredible help I would have never formatted this thesis; and Emily Goetsch who proofread the final draft of my thesis. Thank you to Laura Vinti who accommodated me for a month in Washington DC and Stacey Crawshaw who hosted me in London many times. A special thank you must also be reserved for Thomas dalla Costa who has both encouraged and helped me over the last two years. I shall also remember Mandy Richter and her husband Nicola who runs the best restaurant of Florence. Without Nicola's wonderful food and wine my period of

research in Italy would have not been the same. I am sure Jackie Spicer would agree with me.

Last, but not least, my final thank you is for Natalie Lussey, for her friendship, funny coffee breaks, and for her proofreading skills. Thank you for reading every single word of my dissertation over and over again. And for introducing me to the wonderful world of macaroons.

List of abbreviations

ASF	Archivio di Stato, Florence
ASPSFS	Archivio Storico della Provincia San Francesco Stigmatizzato
BML	Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana
BNCF	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze
C. Strozzi	Carte Stroziane
Cl.	Classe
Cod.	Codice
Corp. Sopp.	Corporazioni Soppresse dal Governo Francese
Inf.	Inferiore
JWCI	Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes
LoC	Library of Congress
Plut.	Plutei
Magliab.	Magliabecchiano
MAP	Mediceo Avanti il Principato
MS	Manoscritti
NA	Notarile Antecosimiano

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Introduction

How did patrons choose their artists? Did Florentine families use art as a strategy for success? Artistic patronage in Renaissance Florence has been a vibrant area of research over the past forty years and the activity of prominent families such as the Medici, Tornabuoni, Sassetti, Strozzi, Soderini and Rucellai has been explored.¹ As an interdisciplinary subject that encompasses studies of economics, sociology, art history, and history, artistic patronage has permitted scholars to contextualise Renaissance artworks in light of the society which produced them. Despite the wide range of secondary material available, the strand of investigation regarding the paradigmatic role of the Medici as art patrons in fifteenth-century Florence and the influence of their taste over Florence's society remains a challenging topic of inquiry. It has been argued that because the Medici were at the vanguard of cultural fashion, the focus on the artistic choices of this household and its immediate kin might 'distort our notion of the visual arts in the fifteenth century'.² Building upon the studies that have considered this aspect before, and of which I am giving an overview below, my work contributes to the literature on the artistic patronage in fifteenth-century Florence by examining an overlooked family: the Vespucci.

It was the collection of essays *With and without the Medici: Studies in Tuscan art and patronage 1434-1530*, assembled by Alison Wright and Eckart Marchand in 1998, that, whilst keeping the focus on the Medici's political and

¹ For an overview of family patronage at the time of Lorenzo il Magnifico: RUBIN 1999, 32-75. There is a vast literature on the patronage of the Medici family. See for example: GOMBRICH 1966, 35-57. AMES-LEWIS 1995, 19-216. On Cosimo de' Medici: KENT 2000, 129-365; KENT 2011, 299-310. On Piero the Gouty: AMES-LEWIS 1993, 207-220. For recent studies regarding Lorenzo il Magnifico see below, n. 4. On the Rucellai family: KENT 1972, 397-401; KENT 1981 vol. 1, 9-95; BELLUZZI 2009, 103-134; KENT 2009b, 80-101; RINALDI 2009, 3-33. On the Sassetti family: BOROOK and OFFERHAUS 1981, 16-20, 27-52; BELLINI 1998, 79-88; GOMBRICH 1997, 11-35. On the Strozzi family: ELAM 1991, 183-194; BELLINI 1998, 101-104; SRICCHIA SANTORO 2011, 41-54; BOUCHER and HUBBARD 2010, 217-223; ACIDINI LUCHINAT 2011, 51-63. On the Tornabuoni family: SIMONS 1987, 221-250; HATFIELD 1996, 112-117; BELLINI 1998, 89-100; CAMPBELL 2007, 1-19; SMAN 2008, 159-186; SMAN 2010, passim; DEPRANO 2013, 127-142; SIMONS 2013, 103-135. Dr. Maria DePrano (Villa I Tatti, Hanna Kiel Fellow 2013-2014) is preparing a volume on the Tornabuoni family entitled '*Art and family: Tornabuoni patronage in late fifteenth-century Florence*'.

² BURKE 2004, 10-11.

cultural dominance, first questioned 'how far the actions of the Medici family inevitably set the standards for other Florentine families'.³ Attention concentrated on Laurentian Florence, with Lorenzo il Magnifico being celebrated up to modern times as an emblematic patron and collector.⁴ Examining aspects such as conventual patronage, the construction and decoration of private chapels, the decoration of countryside properties, and the patron-artist relationship, contributions explored the motivations behind the artistic commissions of families such as the Sassetti, Tornabuoni, and Lanfredini, the manifestation of their artistic taste, and the degree to which their commissions conformed to the cultural choices of the Medici.⁵ Aspects such as political association, artistic emulation, reflection of the Medici cultural interests, as well as signs of possible 'independence' of Florentine patrons were raised. Despite its insightful contributions, however, the volume only started to explore the complex dynamics between Florentine families and their artistic patronage, setting 'an agenda for research', as Kate Lowe commented upon her own essay.⁶

A step forward was later taken by Jill Burke who considered the activity of two relatively 'new' families, the Nasi and Del Pugliese, and discussed how the commissions for their palaces and private chapels, and the purchase of material goods, were strategically aimed at confirming and maintaining their newfound elite status.⁷ The author showed how the artist-patron relationship outside Lorenzo il Magnifico's sphere was not hierarchical, but rather based on friendship. This is what allowed Piero del Pugliese to independently establish links with artists and foster young talented painters such as Filippino Lippi and Piero di Cosimo.⁸

³ WRIGHT and MARCHAND 1998, 1.

⁴ Among the most recent studies: KENT 2004, 44-151. ACIDINI LUCHINAT 2005, 11-63. ACIDINI LUCHINAT 2013, 22-27. PONS 2013, 39-43.

⁵ See in particular: LOWE 1998, 129-153; WRIGHT 1998, 47-77; MARCHAND 1998, 107-127; O'MALLEY 1998, 155-178; LILLIE 1998, 19-46.

⁶ LOWE 1998, 147.

⁷ BURKE 2004, 35-83.

⁸ BURKE 2004, 96.

These studies prompt further investigation into the activity of other families, both 'new' and from the patriciate, and raise questions such as: what was their contribution to the arts in Florence? How independent and free were they as patrons? Did they take part in the development of the visual arts through their commissions, cultural choices, and promotion of artists? In 2010 Michelle O' Malley made a tantalising comment that, despite its potentially important implications, has so far remained unobserved. Investigating the role Renaissance patrons and the works they commissioned played in the creation of artists's reputations and careers, the author discussed the paintings executed by Botticelli for the Tribunale della Mercanzia of Florence. O' Malley noted that as early as 1470, when the commission took place, the relationship between the Medici and Botticelli was weak. Citing Ernst Gombrich, who tried to demote the figure of Lorenzo from patron to a simple collector unaware of the new trends, O' Malley restated that although the art of Botticelli blossomed in Laurentian Florence, no artworks can be ascribed to the patronage of Lorenzo il Magnifico.⁹ This brought the author to suggest that someone else might have championed the artist and that it was 'not unthinkable that the Vespucci might have wanted to position themselves as power brokers by promoting their neighbour (Botticelli) for a prestigious commission'.¹⁰

Taking the cue from O' Malley's consideration, my work explores the artistic patronage of the Vespucci, a less documented 'new' family that flourished at the time of Lorenzo il Magnifico. The lack of information on the Vespucci's history and the family's social and intellectual role has affected the current knowledge of the family's artistic patronage. Paintings by Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and Piero di Cosimo have been considered only from the viewpoint of the artist's life and style, missing out on their connections with their Vespucci patrons, and underestimating the importance that these commissions had in the development of Florentine art and patronage. By placing the family and its artistic choices into context and incorporating them into the vast literature of fifteenth-century patronage, the

⁹ GOMBRICH 1972, 65.

¹⁰ O'MALLEY 2010, 15.

scope of this study is to expand previous research on the active participation of Florentine families in the cultural and artistic scene of the city by deepening our comprehension of the Vespucci and by refining specific debates that surround the artworks they commissioned from Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and Piero di Cosimo. The examination of the leading role of the Vespucci in the promotion of the arts provides evidence to argue that the evolution of and 'control' over artistic taste was not unilateral. The Medici influenced Florentine patrons as much as they (and their closest kin) were stimulated by the artistic commissions of others, notably the Vespucci family, as I will show.

Before turning the attention to the Vespucci, I would like to discuss the current state of research on Florentine artistic patronage and the family. Previous studies inform my research and they constitute the background in which my findings are contextualised.

Patronage is a social process that dominates political, social, religious, artistic and economic spheres and, as Ronald Weissman discussed, it is the oldest way of organising society in the Mediterranean.¹¹ Despite its intent of finding a common ground between social and political patronage, and artistic patronage, the collection of essays edited by Francis William Kent and Patricia Simons in 1987 fall into two distinct groups, providing only a few links between these two concepts of patronage.¹² It has now been proved, however, that art patronage is strongly connected to social and political patronage: Tracey Cooper's discussion of the division between political or social patronage (*clientismo*) and art patronage (*mecenatismo*) has, in fact, been revised by scholars who bridged the gap between these two aspects and demonstrated the mechanics of the relationship that occurred between patrons, artists, and society.¹³

¹¹ WEISSMAN 1987, 25-45.

¹² KENT and SIMONS 1987, *passim*.

¹³ COOPER 1996, 19-32.

The studies of social historians such as Ronald Weissman, Richard Trexler, Francis William Kent, and Dale Kent have shown how Florentine families interacted through a social process based on a system of networks that included neighbours and friends and that was extended beyond the ruling class.¹⁴ Kinship, friendship, and neighbourhood determined artistic commission in many ways. The choice of artists, for instance, was often determined by physical vicinity: the Lanfredini family commissioned Antonio del Pollaiuolo, who was living in their same area of Florence, for the representation of dancing nudes in their villa at Arcetri.¹⁵ Similarly, the artists who prepared the setting for the *sacra rappresentazione* in Santa Maria del Carmine lived in the church neighbourhood.¹⁶ In other cases, friendship was at the basis of the patron-artist relationship such as in the case of Piero del Pugliese, as mentioned above.

The choice of an artist was also influenced by the track record of previous commissions: turning the attention to one artist rather than another would have prompted specific associations between Florentine families and fostered their prestige and status. John Spencer noted that Andrea del Castagno was a much sought-after painter by the Medici and their allies; Alison Wright discussed how the Pollaiuolo brothers, Medici painters in the 1470s, were employed by families such as the Lanfredini and the Pucci who aimed to consolidate their affiliation with Lorenzo il Magnifico; and Dale Kent showed how Desiderio da Settignano, associated with Cosimo de' Medici, was employed by his friends who opted for the same artistic choices.¹⁷

The way artistic patronage is related to social relations, started to be explored by Patricia Simons in her examination of the Tornabuoni chapel in Santa Maria Novella, and it was further investigated by Eckart Marchand, according to whom the poses, gestures, and costumes of the bystanders portrayed in the

¹⁴ TREXLER 1980, 131-158; WEISSMAN 1982, 1-41; KLAPISCH-ZUBER 1985, 68-93. KENT 1987, 79-98; KENT 1995, 171-192; KENT 2009, 17-83.

¹⁵ WRIGHT 1998, 47-77.

¹⁶ NEWBIGIN 1996, 45-155.

¹⁷ SPENCER 1991, 15-77, 120. WRIGHT 1998, 47-77 and 2005, 210-212. KENT 2011, 299-310.

Sasseti and Tornabuoni chapel frescoes provide us with useful social information.¹⁸ What patrons ultimately sought through the choice of artists and the commission of artworks was, to use Creighton Gilbert's words, 'the enhancement of their honour and splendour'.¹⁹ Artworks served as a medium between patrons and society and permitted the 'self fashioning' of citizens.²⁰ Broadly speaking, therefore, art patronage constructed identities, consolidated political and social associations and marked self-distinction.

Scholarly attention considered the role patrons had over the final appearance of artworks. Patricia Simons's study on the Tornabuoni questioned the respective responsibilities of Giovanni Tornabuoni and Domenico Ghirlandaio in the realisation of the chapel programme, leading the way to new considerations concerning the patron-artist relationship.²¹ Anabel Thomas later focused her attention on the painter and his practice, and recognised the predominant role of the patron in the making of an artwork: patrons were responsible for the appointment of the artist, the decision of the pigments to adopt and, in some cases, the iconography of the work.²² Michelle O'Malley, surveying extant Renaissance contracts, showed the role of both the contracting parties, discussing the agreements and the exchange of visual information between the artist and the patron.²³ Through the numerous examples offered in his article Creighton Gilbert argued that the role of the patron varied depending on the commission: sometimes patrons indicated themes in a general way while other times they presented more precise ideas.²⁴ Focussing on the concept of *amicizia*, Jill Burke argued that clients' desires would have been fulfilled even without rigorous contracts given the 'intellectual, quasi-spiritual link between the two parties involved'.²⁵ By taking these studies into account I will consider the relationship that linked the Vespucci to their

¹⁸ SIMONS 1987, 221-250. MARCHAND 1998, 107-127.

¹⁹ GILBERT 1998, 446.

²⁰ For the concept of 'self-fashioning': GREENBLATT 1980, *passim*.

²¹ SIMONS 1987, 221-250.

²² THOMAS 1995, 256.

²³ O'MALLEY 1998, 155-178; O'MALLEY 2005, 197-220.

²⁴ GILBERT 1998, 392-450.

²⁵ BURKE 2004, 94-98.

artists, tracing the origin of their friendship. I will also look at the way in which artists created artworks that reflected the Vespucci's ambitions, taste, and culture, projecting the family and its artists within a specific social network.

Florentine patrons shaped their identities not only through the commission of paintings, sculptures, and architecture, but also through the purchase of a wide range of other objects. Richard Goldthwaite discussed how the emergence of a mercantile economy and growing wealth brought with it an economic boom that resulted in the construction of new buildings, such as palaces, villas, and private chapels, and in a great circulation of material goods in Florence.²⁶ Expenditure and accumulation were encouraged by the expansion of the mercantile activity of the Florentines that brought them to travel across Europe and the Mediterranean, shipping and exchanging goods with the Middle East, Flanders, Portugal, and Spain.²⁷ Evelyn Welch's studies on Renaissance shopping sprees and conspicuous consumption, highlighted the needs of consumers, exploring the market, buyers, prices, and demand. These studies discussed how buying and selling were acts of embedded social behaviour.²⁸ Florentines became avid consumers of the arts that, following contemporary trends, satisfied their personal pleasure while bringing them prestige and social recognition. The direct association of citizens to construction projects and the purchase of artworks became in itself an outward sign of nobility, magnificence, and splendour. The objects purchased communicated political and social links between citizens and promoted ideas of beauty, wealth, and civility.²⁹

The expenditure of Florentine citizens moved in different directions and concerned the decoration of family chapels, the furnishing of palaces, and aspects of bodily display. Churches provided the ideal platform to manifest patronage and friendships. Focussing on Giovanni Rucellai and the neighbourhood of the Red Dragon, Francis William Kent showed how the patrons' decision to purchase and

²⁶ GOLDTHWAITE 1987, 153-175; GOLDTHWAITE 1993, 33-40.

²⁷ MALLEY 1967, 62-143.

²⁸ WELCH 2005, 212-243.

²⁹ SYSON and THORNTON 2001, 12, 23. LINDOW 2007, 77-116. MUSACCHIO 2008, 58-59.

offer patronage rights in specific churches showed alliances and associations between families.³⁰ Jill Burke noted that something similar happened in Santo Spirito where Tanai de' Nerli, *operaio* in the church, tried to acquire a chapel for one of his friends.³¹ Beautifully decorated private chapels offered affluent patrons the opportunity to signal their wealth, display their magnificence, and communicate their social status to their fellow citizens.³²

Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis explored domestic aspects of Renaissance Italy and by looking at a wide range of objects including textiles, majolica, cutlery, jewels, devotional objects, furniture, and paintings, they defined the role the household played in the creation of art and culture.³³ Jacqueline Musacchio also discussed the presence of material culture in the Florentine *palazzo* and showed how the commission of birth trays, wedding chests, and painted wainscoting marked important events of the family's life cycle such as birth, marriage, and death. These objects were not intended to be for the families's private use only, but to be shown to a larger public. The display of artworks, together with that of arms and armours, the use of board games, and the staging of dancers, musicians, and actors during *feste*, transformed Florentine households in designated settings for entertainment. Receiving guests and paying visits to other citizens became important aspects in the lives of affluent Renaissance families: they encouraged sociability whilst promoting the culture and refinement of patrons.³⁴

Dresses and jewels served a similar purpose. Richard Goldthwaite discussed how clothing was part of the demand of Florentines for material goods.³⁵ As a mercantile city, Florence imported raw materials from the Low Countries and northern Europe. Once in Florence, cloths were finished, dyed and exported, which contributed to strengthening the city's economy and increasing its importance as a

³⁰ KENT 1987, 79-98.

³¹ BURKE 2004, 73.

³² NELSON 2008, 113-131.

³³ AJMAR-WOLLHEIM and DENNIS 2006, 206-221.

³⁴ MUSACCHIO 2008, 2-61.

³⁵ GOLDTHWAITE 1980, 31-32.

centre of textile production. Clothes became a much sought-after commodity among Florence's population and the studies of Jacqueline Herald and Carol Collier Frick have done much to deepen our comprehension of the use, function and meaning of Renaissance dresses.³⁶ Clothing defined citizens, indicated their status, and reflected social and political relationships. Prominent citizens of Florence were ostentatious, displaying their rank and wealth by fine textiles and fashionable jewels. As Jane Bridgeman noted, appropriate clothing called out for respect, ornaments being the 'outward symbol of intrinsic virtue'.³⁷

Florentine families found common ground in the commission of projects and in the purchasing of luxury goods: bearing an aesthetic value, these objects were not only loaded with devotional and didactic meaning, but conveyed the patron's cultural standard, they ultimately acted as social binding between elite families. This is the context in which the Vespucci operated.

1. The Vespucci: Between history and myth

What do we know about the Vespucci? As I will discuss below, the majority of studies have focused on two family members: Amerigo, the explorer who in the fifteenth century sailed the Atlantic and reached the coasts of America which was named after him; and Simonetta, believed to have been the muse of Florentine painters and poets. Over the last ten years, however, historians have dedicated growing attention to other members of the family. Carlo Baldini's *I Vespucci di Greve in Chianti, Peretola e Firenze*, schematically organised as a list, provides the names of Vespucci family members belonging to the three different urban lines, together with data regarding their life such as weddings, political offices, and burial location.³⁸ The articles published by Karl Schlebusch offer an insight into the family members of Amerigo's branch, focussing in particular on Giorgio Antonio.³⁹ A renewed interest in the Vespucci recently emerged due to the activity of a Florence-

³⁶ HERALD 1981, 43-65; FRICK 2002, 179-180.

³⁷ BRIDGEMAN 1998, 48.

³⁸ BALDINI 2004a, 25-93.

³⁹ SCHLEBUSCH 2009, 364-374; SCHLEBUSCH 2014, forthcoming.

based association, the 'Comitato Amerigo Vespucci a Casa Sua', founded in 2010 together with their official publication *I Navigatori Toscani, Quaderni Vespucciani*. The group's mission statement expressed the desire to emphasise the personality of Amerigo the explorer and to place him into his historical context.⁴⁰ The contributions of Marco Conti, in particular, are devoted to Amerigo's family, its members, properties, and heraldic devices.⁴¹

These studies, valuable and informative as they are, present some limitations. First, they only provide us with partial information on the Vespucci, missing out on the broader picture necessary to contextualise the family in fifteenth-century Florence. Baldini's volume, for example, lists information regarding the life and activity of each family member, but this data is not integrated and compared with that which has emerged from the studies of other Florentine families. Secondly, contributions are mainly concerned with the family of Amerigo the explorer, paying scant attention to the other two branches of the Vespucci. Thirdly, while admitting that a lack of information surrounds the history of the Vespucci, historians have shown little interest in expanding their research towards other branches of the family. I believe that the reason behind the scant attention given to the Vespucci family, finds its root in the way in which Amerigo and Simonetta have been perceived. While trying to treat them as historical characters, academic and popular perceptions have created legends around these two personalities, suspending them somewhere between history and myth. This has consequently affected the way in which the family has been perceived.

Publications on Amerigo's life and travels started to appear in the sixteenth century. As Ilaria Luzzana Caraci discussed in 2007, Bartolomé de la Casas was the first to question Vespucci's travelling achievements over Columbus's in 1561.⁴² Issues were raised about the exact number of expeditions which Amerigo embarked upon himself, an aspect which is difficult to pin down due to the controversial

⁴⁰ For the mission's statement of the group: RUFFILLI 2010, 5-7.

⁴¹ CONTI 2010a, 279; CONTI 2010b, 280; CONTI 2010c, 281; CONTI 2012a, 97-149; CONTI 2012b, 60-87.

⁴² LUZZANA CARACI 2007, 67.

primary source material handed down to modern times. The interest in the travels of Amerigo on one side, and the scant and inconsistent documentation of his discoveries on the other, soon brought other scholars to question the accuracy of Amerigo's supposedly autograph writings, namely the letters sent to Lorenzo di Piefrancesco de' Medici and Piero Soderini in the first years of the sixteenth century. The historical doubts concerning Amerigo's travels have started to be the focus of exhibitions, conferences, and of a large literature output, constituting the heart of the so-called *questione vespucciana*.⁴³ These issues also featured in a series of articles and publications issued in 1898 to mark the centenary of Amerigo, Toscanelli, and Savonarola. In the same year Gustavo Uzielli edited and commented on Angelo Maria Bandini's *Vita di Amerigo Vespucci*, the earliest and largest publication on the navigator.⁴⁴

Fuelling what became a major discussion of Amerigo, Bartolomé de la Casas proceeded to cast a halo of mystery on the navigator. In addition to the unsolved aspects of his voyages, the fascinating imagery of exotic new lands and the intriguing idea of cannibalism further contributed to the perception of Amerigo as a mythical figure.⁴⁵ This is expressed visually in the prints for the *Nova Reperta*, commissioned by Luigi Alamanni from Johannes Stradanus in the 1580s (Figure 1). While recognising the historical importance of Amerigo as the discoverer of the New World, the prints charged the navigator with a somewhat 'fairly-tale' aura: imaginary representations featured Amerigo on a galley surrounded by

⁴³ An extensive literature exists on Amerigo. Among the most recent contributions: TINACCI MOSSELLO et al. 2005, 3-124, 315-357; FORMISANO 2006, 15-35; LUZZANA CARACI 2007, 47-206; VARELA 2007, 49-82; CARDINI and MONTESANO 2011, 129-177. For an overview of the problematic issues surrounding the 'questione vespucciana': LUZZANA CARACI 2007, 65-94. In 1954 the *Mostra Vespucciana* organised in the Palazzo Vecchio gathered documents related to Amerigo, focussing on the use of nautical and cartographic instruments during the Renaissance: MARTINI 1955, vii. Among the most recent conferences organised in 2012: *Viaggi nel Mondo di Amerigo* (Florence, 21-22 November 2012, Palazzo Medici Riccardi and Ognissanti); *Vespucci, Firenze e le Americhe* (Florence, 22-24 November 2012. Dipartimento di Studi Storici e Geografici, Università di Firenze); *Mundus Novus. Vespucci: Ancient World and New World* (Lisbon, 13-14 December 2012. CHAM, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa)

⁴⁴ GORI 1898, 3-4, 13-14, 17-19, 30-32, 39-44, 56, 63-64, 67-71, 110-112; UZIELLI 1898, 1-130.

⁴⁵ On Amerigo and cannibalism: SCHREFFLER 2005, 295-310.

mythological marine figures such as tritons and sirens.⁴⁶ The construction of Amerigo as a figure belonging to the realm of fantasy sharpened over the centuries and has not ceased in recent times: three issues of Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse*, dedicated to Christopher Columbus and the discoveries of the Americas, portrayed Amerigo 'Goofucci' as a legendary character who reached far-away lands and encountered alien peoples (Figure 2).⁴⁷

A similar approach has characterised the attention devoted to Simonetta, celebrated as one of the most beautiful ladies of fifteenth-century Florence and remembered as the 'lover' of Giuliano de' Medici. Although the archival investigation of Rachele Farina reconstructed the life of Simonetta from her origins in Genoa to her stay in Florence, the majority of studies, such as those of Monika Schmitter, Paola Ventrone, Giovanna Lazzi, and Etle Brooke Ross, have focused on her likeness to Botticelli's female representations, and the possibility of her being their model and source of inspiration.⁴⁸ Literature has widened the gap between those who held Botticelli's paintings to be actual representations of Simonetta and those who consider them a generic conception of beauty. Simonetta soon began to embody different meanings, variously seen by the collective imagination as an historical character, a nymph, a goddess, Mary, and Cleopatra. Like Amerigo, Simonetta also became a popular figure and her 'media phenomenon' was recently conveyed through Omar Ronda's exhibition *Metamorfosi di Primavera*. The artist reshaped paintings and photographs of Simonetta and Marilyn Monroe, paired as icons whose beauty transcends time (Figure 3).⁴⁹

⁴⁶ On Johannes Stradanus, his representations of Amerigo Vespucci, and the discovery of the New World see in particular: BARONI VANNUCCI 1997, 282 n. 461; 286 n. 467; 288-289 n. 478, 480; MARKEY 2012, 28-40; SMAN 2012, 147-156.

⁴⁷ UNKNOWN 1983, *passim*.

⁴⁸ SCHMITTER 1995, 33-57; FARINA 2001, 9-29; LAZZI 2005, 220-226; VENTRONE 2007, 7-49; ETTLE 2008, 3-10. Extensive work was done by Judith Allan on the literary representation of Simonetta Vespucci: Judith ALLAN's MPhil thesis: *'Alma Diva Leggiadra Simonetta': Culture and politics in literary representations of Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci* (2010). Department of Italian Studies, College of Arts and Law, the University of Birmingham (available online <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/1136/>); and ALLAN 2014, 4-23.

⁴⁹ LAZZI 2010, 9; LUCHS 2012, 75-97.

The ways in which Amerigo and Simonetta have been looked at prompt some consideration. Although studies on Amerigo Vespucci stressed the predominant role of the navigator as the agent of the Medici Bank in Seville, they did not clarify how Amerigo entered the Medici circle. Mention was made of the contacts his uncles Giorgio Antonio and Guidoantonio had with the Medici household, but the discourse did not dig further. Silence was somehow cast also on Simonetta. Investigation into the life of the Genoese lady highlighted the relationship of her groom Marco and his father-in-law Piero with the Medici, but no information was given regarding how the two Vespucci became acquainted with Lorenzo il Magnifico and how they entered into political and commercial business with him.

As mentioned above, inter-family ties were consolidated over long periods of time and they were at the base of patronage and business arrangements. The fact that an individual made his entrance into society with and through his family suggests that the prestige Amerigo and Simonetta enjoyed was connected to the family's importance in Florence. Given that a family's relevance is assessed by taking into account its political role, its social status, and its involvement into cultural and artistic aspects, questions such as 'What was the role of the Vespucci in Renaissance Florence?'; 'How did they express themselves visually?'; 'What distinguished them from other Florentine families?' are some of the questions that this work will attempt to answer.

Unlike other patronage studies that have looked at the activity of one family member or a single branch of a family, my research takes into account the three branches of the Vespucci, offering a multi-layered analysis of the family's history and engagement with the arts.⁵⁰ Attention is given to the cultural circles that the Vespucci were part of and that allowed family members to anticipate the cultural trends that fuelled Florence's intellectual gatherings. This will lead to the analysis of the Vespucci's private patronage and the consideration of paintings by Botticelli,

⁵⁰ For other patronage studies see n.1.

Ghirlandaio and Piero di Cosimo controversially believed to have been commissioned by the family. As I will discuss, lack of knowledge about the family has facilitated the creation of incorrect theories around its artistic patronage that, handed down from study to study, have been taken for granted. My research modifies past assumptions and through historical, art historical, and archival resources, I begin to remedy this state of affairs by advancing new evidence and interpretations over the dates of execution, the meaning of the paintings, and the identity of the patrons. This brings us to look at how the Vespucci artworks aimed at reaching and impressing Florence's elite, providing this audience with images that, rooted in the shared cultural values of the time, presented groundbreaking features. The analysis of the peculiar Vespucci artistic choices is explained by looking at the lives, activity, and interests of the patrons. This fosters considerations of how family members influenced the realisation of the work through their erudition and elevated status as art patrons, thus paving the way to the setting of new artistic trends, and the shaping of the careers of some of the most renowned artists of Florence.

2. Sources and methodology. A peculiar family 'archive'

Investigating the history and patronage of the Vespucci family is far from an easy task. Unlike other prominent Florentine families like the Medici, Guicciardini, and the Strozzi, the Vespucci do not benefit from a family *fondo*. Private papers are scattered in the Florence State Archive and elsewhere, and the lack of private *ricordanze*, diaries, and account books does not offer a ready insight into the life and activity of Vespucci family members. Because of the invaluable insights original documents can provide, tackling the archival issues surrounding the family became the main concern my research had to face in order to broadly analyse the Vespucci.

My point of departure for understanding the current state of knowledge and documentation about the family was the so-called 'Vespucci Family Papers', a bulk of thirty folders and index cards with annotations and transcriptions of archival documents from Florence's Archivio di Stato (Figure 4). Kept in the Manuscript

Division of the Library of Congress in Washington DC, this can be considered the one and only 'archive' of the Vespucci family. The documentation comprises transcriptions of fifteenth and sixteenth-century archival documents assembled by the historian Germán Arciniegas (1900-1999) who donated this collection to the Library of Congress in 1993.⁵¹ A Colombian writer, diplomat, and visiting professor at New York Colombia University in 1947, Arciniegas demonstrated his interest in investigating the relationship between the Old and New Continents following the fifteenth and sixteenth-century geographical discoveries, and he gathered a large number of documents related to the Vespucci family while investigating Amerigo's life and travels.⁵² Arciniegas's initial research emerged in three published works respectively dedicated to Amerigo, Simonetta, and Guidoantonio Vespucci: *Amerigo y el Nuevo Mundo* (1951), later translated into English; *El mundo de la bella Simonetta* (1962); and *El embajador. Vida de Guido Antonio tio de Amerigo Vespucci* (1990). Arciniegas intended to publish a large volume on Vespucci family's history and the drafts of his chapters, each focussing on predominant family members, are to be found among the Vespucci Family Papers in Washington DC. This work was unfinished at the time of Arciniegas's death and his drafts have been neglected by scholars.

Further research I carried out in the Florentine State Archive has helped consolidate the initial *corpus* of information gathered at the Library of Congress. Investigation into the family's history started with the analysis of Vespucci genealogical trees. Retrieved from the Carte Pucci, Bardi, dell'Ancisa, and Sebreghondi they were first consulted to understand Vespucci family structure. Problems soon emerged as this material raised doubts as to the exact number of

⁵¹ Arciniegas formally turned over the collection at ceremonies at the Library following his lecture on 'Los Vespucci de Florencia' on 27 April 1993. An audio recording of the lecture is preserved in the Library of Congress while an article related to the donation appeared on the Library of Congress Bulletin: UNKNOWN 1993, available online <http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/93/9312/vespucci.html>

⁵² Arciniegas' correspondence, preserved in one of the collection's folders, provides an insight into the support the historian benefited from during his research. The archivists Gino Corti and Marcello del Piazzo, in particular, appear leading figures in Arciniegas' investigation, having sent him transcriptions of letters, documents, and *notizie* related to the Vespucci retrieved from the Florentine State Archive.

family members and on the relationship that linked one to another. An attempt to overcome these issues was made by surveying the tax declarations of the *catasto*, the Florentine tax system that the study of David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber proved to be an essential source to survey families's structures, wealth, and belongings.⁵³ Incorporating the data from the *catasto* entries made it possible for me to draw the new family tree discussed in Chapter 1.

Tax declarations not only provided an insight into the family structure, but they were also fundamental in retrieving information on individual members. Revealing the names of family notaries, tax declarations allowed me to locate Vespucci testaments, contracts, and wedding agreements in the Notarile Antecosimiano, which constituted the principal focus of investigation. Research into this *fondo*, however, was problematic due to the numerous notaries employed by the Vespucci: they differed not only from one branch to the other, but also between members of the same line. What complicated things further is that single members of the family often had more than one notary working for them. This might be explained by the several activities the Vespucci were involved in which made them commission different notaries during different periods of their lives. Giorgio Antonio Vespucci is representative: his three wills were drawn up by Ser Paolo Grassi between 1497 and 1499; the papers related to Giorgio Antonio becoming canon in the 1480s are to be found in Alessandro Braccese's registers; while the documents regarding the acquisition of the rights for the family chapel in Ognissanti were written by Ser Girolamo Mei in 1472, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Some private papers belonging to Giorgio Antonio were also located in the *fondo* of the Conventi Soppressi dal Governo Francese. Here, in the folder of the Badia Fiesolana, inventories of books and *conti* were retrieved. By assembling this information and incorporating it with secondary literature it was possible to reconstruct the life and activity of Giorgio Antonio, mapping his social role and intellectual influence in fifteenth-century Florence (Chapters 1 and 2).

⁵³ HERLIHY and KLAPISCH-ZUBER 1985, 1-27.

Notary names were not only taken from tax declarations, but also from *fondi* dating to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Several documents were, in fact, located in the archives of those families linked to the Vespucci through marriage. Some of the *filze* belonging to the Gherardi Piccolomini, the Guadagni, and the Marzi Medici families proved fruitful as the copies of some Vespucci documents revealed the original notaries employed by the family in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This is the case of the copies of some Vespucci wills I retrieved from the Gherardi Piccolomini archive. They led to the registers of Ser Giovanni di Guido Manetti where it was possible to locate the original wills, and other documents drawn up for the Vespucci. Similarly, the name of Ser Bastiano Bindi appeared in relation to Antonio di Amerigo Vespucci in the Marzi Medici archive. My examination of some of the volumes of Ser Bindi uncovered documentation relating to Antonio Vespucci's dowries for his two nieces. The identification of notaries was, in some cases, problematic. The names of the notaries cited in tax declarations or other family documents could not always be found in the modern inventory of the Archivio di Stato. In other instances, the documents copied in the later centuries did not appear in the surviving notarial protocols.⁵⁴

Documents relating to the Vespucci were also found scattered in various *fondi* of the Archivio di Stato, such as the Mediceo Avanti il Principato; the Carte Stroziane; Manoscritti; the Notarile Antecosimiano and Moderno; the Deputazioni sopra la Nobiltà; the Magistrato dei Pupilli; the Corporazioni Religiose Soppresse dal Governo Francese; and in the Guilds' records. The possibility that a Vespucci archive could exist somewhere else cannot be excluded, perhaps aggregated to a particular *fondo* to which research on the family would not necessarily lead. The contacts established by the Vespucci with Italian and European courts furthermore increase the possibility of Vespucci documents being found in other archives inside and outside of Italy. Constraints of time and the specific Florentine focus of this

⁵⁴ The problematic aspects of carrying out systematic investigation in the *fondo* Notarile Antecosimiano were already expressed by Samuel Cohn: COHN 1980, 12-42.

work, however, limited archival investigation to Florence. A selection of the Vespucci documents gathered during the course of this study is in Appendices 2 and 3. The former includes the transcription of the first family inventory ever retrieved, which I was able to locate in an overlooked folder of the *fondo* Conventi Soppressi. Listing the objects that were in the house of Bartolomeo Vespucci in 1479, this document is an invaluable source of insight into the possession of one family member and a better understanding of what objects the family surrounded itself with in the years of its social growth. The second - and last - inventory that I located registered the possessions in the house of Lapo Vespucci in 1424. Given that this document is chronologically distant from the period of my enquiry, I have only briefly mentioned it in Chapter 2. Both documents were drawn up after the death of the owner of the property and, following the conventional format of Florentine house inventories, they recorded the different rooms of the house and the object displayed in each of them.⁵⁵ The recovery of more inventories would have provided a better picture of the Vespucci taste, interests, and financial means, and it cannot be excluded that further documentation will be found in the Florentine archive. According to the archival material I retrieved, in fact, the Vespucci shared with other families the customary activity of producing written records whether in the form of dowries, wills, letters, or private memories. It is therefore possible that more inventories were produced, but it is difficult to establish if they have not survived or if they are today part of overlooked *fondi*. The important role that the annotation of objects had for the Vespucci is evident in the family wills. Of the several family wills discussed in Chapter 1, I decided to include in Appendix 2 only those relating to Giorgio Antonio Vespucci. Unlike the wills of other family members, they can be considered as small inventories: all the objects Giorgio Antonio possessed and passed on to his heirs are carefully detailed, which make the wills an invaluable source for deepening our understanding of the possessions of the Vespucci and evaluating how the family expressed itself visually.

⁵⁵ For similar examples see: CHIOSTRINI MANNINI 1989, 111-114. BURKE 2004, 49 and following.

In order to investigate the history of Vespucci, the activity of its members, and the family's artistic patronage in the fifteenth century, my research moved in different directions and relied on a wide range of material. This included private and public papers, city chronicles, ecclesiastic records, *sepoltuari*, armorials, and heraldic sources. Secondary literature also played an important part as it permitted me to evaluate the current state of knowledge on the Vespucci, assemble the scattered information previously published, and expand it with the archival documentation retrieved. As a result, this work not only considers the field of history of art, but employs contributions from other related disciplines such as economics, anthropology, social history, and philosophy.

The analysis of visual material has also played a fundamental role. Although research into the artistic patronage of the Vespucci started from, and developed around, the paintings believed to have been commissioned by the family, investigation was not limited to these works. Different sources were employed to support the analysis of works by Botticelli, Piero di Cosimo, and Ghirlandaio, which included architectural examples, manuscripts, miniatures, cartographic material, and photographic records of restoration campaigns. An example of this multifaceted investigation is given in Chapter 4, in which Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* is considered. Different sources were employed here for the identification of the flying insects on the top right corner of the panel: slab stones; coats of arms; *sepoltuari*; miniatures; and genealogical trees.

Visual material, archival sources, and the secondary literature of different fields of knowledge have all been integrated into this study. Intertwining this data was fundamental, and has helped me to propose new dates of execution for the paintings considered; encouraged reflection on the artistic cross-cultural exchanges between Florence, Italy, and the rest of Europe in the fifteenth century; and permitted me to examine the artistic patronage of the Vespucci from multiple angles, offering new insights into the history, meaning, and reasons for their commissions.

3. Dispelling myths: The Vespucci family in context

Focussing on the history of the Vespucci family, its influence and its patronage in fifteenth-century Florence, this work takes into account the period of 1470-1500. This choice, based upon the execution date of the artworks considered, allows me to draw attention to Laurentian Florence, both the most significant decades of the family's history and the most debated period in the literature on family patronage, but also to enrich previous studies by expanding the chronological boundaries generally considered. This is because extant literature on fifteenth-century patronage ceases around 1492-94, leaving a gap between the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico and the beginning of the Florentine Republic under Piero Soderini in 1502. Although scholars have focused on Florentine politics, religion, and the arts, (all of which have generally been considered in relation to Savonarola), aspects related to family patronage in this period of transition await further investigation.⁵⁶ By looking at the 1490s, my research considers what happened on the artistic scene of the city after the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico and, taking the Vespucci as a case study, speculates on the use of art as a tool that prompted identification with specific political ideologies.⁵⁷ Considering this 'enlarged' time frame, in fact, permits me to better evaluate the relationship of the Vespucci with the Medici and that of the Vespucci with other families of Florence. By surveying the social and political position of the Vespucci before and after the Medici expulsion, I can ask if any changes occurred in the role of the family within Florence and how the different political, cultural, and social circumstances that characterised Laurentian and Republican Florence, affected the Vespucci's artistic patronage.

Chapter 1 aims to set the scene by offering an introduction to the Vespucci family's history and structure. In the first part, three urban lines of the Vespucci are considered and for each line the most relevant family members are singled out. The broad range of ways in which family units and lineages can be defined requires a

⁵⁶ Among the most recent studies on the arts at the time of Savonarola: LEPRI and PALESATI 2000, 85-133; BURKE 2004, 155-187; FEUILLET 2010, 39-85; BURKE 2012, 252-289; LAZZERINI 2013, 91-101.

⁵⁷ This has been done for the sixteenth century: BURKE 2012, 264-265.

clarification of the terminology adopted in the present study. While *household* will express the idea of living together, not always concerning members of one nuclear family, *family* will be used, from time to time, to indicate both the members of one branch and the whole Vespucci lineage.⁵⁸ In order not to create confusion between the different branches, the name of the male individual the branch refers to will always be stated. *Branches* and *lines* will finally be used as interchangeable or synonymous. A new genealogical tree of the family is included as a pull-out table at the end of the thesis. Squared frames highlight the names of the family members discussed in Chapter 1 and this will make it easier to identity the different personalities. The relationship that linked the various members and the sense of family belonging will be examined in the second part of the chapter. While pursuing independent activities for fame and self-glorification, individuals maintained closed ties with the lineage and, more generally, with the whole extended family. This is witnessed in wills, testaments and artistic commissions that, by expressing the identity of a member, also shaped that of the whole family.

The sense of family cohesion enabled the Vespucci to collaborate in the society in which they belonged, ensuring them civic visibility and prestige. Slightly diverging from the studies of Brenda Preyer, Francis William Kent, Dale Kent, and Ronald Weissman who showed that enduring bonds of kinship were established by families dwelling long-term in an ancestral neighbourhood, Chapter 2 discusses how, crossing the borders of their *gonfalone*, members of the Vespucci clan strategically moved across Florence and its *contado*, working towards a re-definition of the family's geographical boundaries and, therefore, its social connections.⁵⁹ By dwelling in different neighborhoods, family members explicitly collaborated to forge new friendships, build enduring alliances, and expand patronage

⁵⁸ Nuclear family can be defined as 'a relatively stable and limited group of people related by blood marriage or adoption who live together and support each other economically and emotionally', CARLIER 2001, 1-11.

⁵⁹ WEISSMAN 1982, 1-41; PREYER 2000, 176-194; KENT 1977, 227-292; KENT and KENT 1982, 1-74; KENT 1987, 79-98.

opportunities by entering the Medici entourage.⁶⁰ Moving away from the hyperlocal approach of previous studies, restricted to one geographical area within Florence, I investigate the Vespucci family from a wider perspective, considering the activity of family members both in Italy and Europe.⁶¹ Travelling broadly as humanists, ambassadors, and merchants, the Vespucci built a network that allowed them to expand their influence outside Florence's boundaries, branching out towards Germany, France, Hungary, Belgium, and England. For this reason, the Vespucci contribute to the current scholarly discourse on the interaction between centres and margins and the spatial awareness of culture that derives from cultural transfer and exchange.⁶² Studies of European cultural interactions in the early modern period have shown that the encounters between different countries generated cultural exchanges and transfers, which encompassed several domains from language and religion to cuisine, fashion and the arts.⁶³ Considering the social web and the regular travels of family members and the contacts they established with European personalities, Chapter 2 reflects on the role the family had as transmitter of culture inside and outside of the city and how they contributed to the promotion of Florence as a fashionable cultural centre.

After introducing the Vespucci family, its members, and possessions, and assessing their cultural, social, and political positions inside and outside of Florence, the following three chapters examine the family's artistic commissions. The material is organised in two main periods: Laurentian Florence (Chapters 3 and 4) and the new Republican Florence of post 1494 (Chapter 5). Despite the intention of maintaining a strict chronological order, thematic coherence required the analysis of the frescoes in Chapter 3 to come before Chapter 4 even though they date

⁶⁰ Despite the several connections that linked the two families, barely any mention of the Vespucci is given in the studies of the Medici: BRION 1969, 13-136; HIBBERT 1974, 121, 193, 322. The lack of Vespucci references characterises also the work of Dale Kent on the Medici friendships and the family network across Florence: KENT 1978, 104-135.

⁶¹ KENT 1978, 49-67; BURKE 2004, 85-98; JURDJEVIC 2008, 1-10; KENT 2011, 299-310; PETTAS 2013, 1-31.

⁶² BURKE 1998, 47-65; CAMPBELL and MILNER 2004, 1-13. For the difference between cultural transfer and cultural exchange: ROECK 2007, 2-4.

⁶³ BELOZERSKAYA 2002, 1-46; ROECK 2007, 1-29. Emphasis on the cultural exchange within and the construction of identities in Renaissance Europe is given in this collection of essays Roodenburg 2007, *passim*.

slightly later. Looking at the decade of 1470-1480, Chapter 3 examines the role that visual arts and cultural activities played in shaping the Vespucci's social identity. Concerned with the ecclesiastical space of Ognissanti and the neighbourhood in which the church is located, this chapter investigates how artistic commissions functioned as means to politically, socially, and culturally connect the Vespucci to Florence's elite, and to convey a precise image of the family across the city. The employment of Botticelli and Ghirlandaio in the family church further permits us to draw conclusions on the role of the Vespucci as art patrons and trendsetters in Laurentian Florence.

Shifting the attention from the public space of Ognissanti to the private interior of the Vespucci properties, Chapter 4 takes into account the role of the visual arts in the family's domestic sphere in the late 1470s. Taking Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* as a case study, the chapter examines the panel in light of Vespucci family history and patronage and advances new hypotheses on the date of execution and the identity of the patron. By making use of existing studies on the use and meaning of domestic furniture and material culture in relation to weddings, I also reflect on the occasion of the commission, the original display, and the meaning of the painting.⁶⁴ Following up from Chapter 3, this chapter will consider the innovative choices of the Vespucci in the commission of secular art, thus reinforcing the pivotal role the family played in the development of Florentine art in the 1470s.

Chapter 5 finally considers the role the Vespucci had in Florence after the Medici expulsion, and assesses the changes that occurred in the family's artistic patronage by looking at the property the Vespucci purchased in the 1490s and the panel paintings they displayed in it. As for Chapter 4, secondary resources on Renaissance domestic interiors are employed. My analysis explores the occasion of the commission, the identity of the patron, and considers the meaning of the

⁶⁴ LYDECKER 1987, 147-175; THORNTON 1991, 111-167; BARRIAULT 1994, 1-8; BASKINS 1998, 1-25; MUSACCHIO 2008, 2-61. Essays on the relationship between wedding and art are gathered in the exhibition catalogue BAYER 2008, *passim*; and PAOLINI et. al. 2010, *passim*.

paintings in light of contemporary political and historical events. The transatlantic voyages of Amerigo Vespucci in the late 1490s, in particular, extend this study to consider the perception of the New World in fifteenth-century Florence. In light of the studies that stress how the encountering of the 'other' is useful in revealing different cultural codes, scholarly output has tried to elucidate the dynamic processes that, during the age of discovery, influenced Italian and European artistic creativity and shaped the visual arts.⁶⁵ Paintings and other artworks witness the contact with cultures in Africa and the Middle East during the Quattrocento and, although fifteenth-century exchanges with the Americas are difficult to pin down - becoming clearer from the mid-sixteenth-century onwards - some observations can still be made. By taking into account the panels that Piero di Cosimo realised for one of the Vespucci properties, Chapter 5 explores the impact that the discovery of the New World, from Columbus to Amerigo, had on Florentine art in the 1490s. Building upon the studies of Dennis Geronimus and Alison Brown, attention will be given to the presence of mythological monstrous figures in Piero di Cosimo's panels, namely centaurs, satyrs, tritons and nereids. Investigation into the nature of the monstrous will be connected to cartographic production attempting links between maps and paintings. Generally studied separately, maps and paintings will be compared and analysed together here as part of the visual culture and artistic output of the last decade of Quattrocento.

A multifaceted family, the Vespucci is a compelling topic of investigation. One of the most interesting aspects is the balance the Vespucci maintained between tradition and innovation, conformity and nonconformity, typical behaviour and atypical actions. The analysis of complex family dynamics, the Vespucci's involvement in Florentine intellectual culture, and their artistic commissions, allows for the reframing of the current knowledge of fifteenth-century Florentine patronage, adding rich and significant elements to the history of Florence and its arts

⁶⁵ FARAGO 1995, 1-20; GINZBURG 2005, 125-126; ROECK 2007, 8-11; KAUFMANN and NORTH 2010, 1-8; SHERIFF 2010, 1-16; BURKE 2013, 714-739.

CHAPTER 1

The Vespucci family: History, lineage, and identity

Who were the Vespucci? In order to answer this question, Chapter 1 considers the urban lineage of the Vespucci who, clustered together, dwelt in the same area of the city. A first glance at the family genealogical tree shows that the various Vespucci were part of one extended lineage from which three main branches can be identified in the fifteenth century: the line of Simone di Piero; the line of Amerigo the Elder; and that of Giuliano di Lapo. Despite their different histories and biographies, the members of these three lines need to be considered in relation to one another, in light of their broader familial context. David Herlihy described the Renaissance family as a group based on a sense of internal cohesion that, through the interaction and collaboration between its members, prepared the individual for his or her entrance in society.¹ Taking into account the members of the Vespucci clan without considering their familial background – as has happened in the cases of Amerigo and Simonetta – would, therefore, prevent one from gaining a full understanding of both the family and its members. The study of these two entities needs to be carried out on several levels: first by considering the activity of the most prominent members within their branch; secondly by analysing how members belonging to collateral branches related to one another; and thirdly by understanding if and how the different branches perceived themselves as part of one whole family.

In recent years a debate has arisen between those social historians who believe that in the fifteenth century the small, or protonuclear, family replaced extended lineage, and conversely those who assert that the broader extended family kept its importance. On the one hand, in his study of the Strozzi, Guicciardini, Gondi, and Capponi families, Richard Goldthwaite argued that the disintegration of

¹ HERLIHY 1996, 7-28.

family units, derived from genealogical changes, caused the loosening of bonds between members of the same family and of collateral lines.² On the other hand Francis William Kent demonstrated that although family branches were self-conscious entities, they also collaborated with each other, showing a strong sense of family cohesiveness.³ According to Kent, it was the sense of family belonging that brought several members of the Rucellai family to pay for the construction of a common Loggia, constructed in front of the Rucellai palace along via della Vigna in Florence.⁴ The controversy between nuclear and extended family continued with Ann Crabb's study of the Strozzi family and that of Philip Jacks and William Caferro on the Spinelli. While Crabb supported Kent, stressing the importance of the ties and solidarity across different branches, Jacks and Caferro, discussing the nuclear family of Tommaso Spinelli, sided with Goldthwaite.⁵ How do the Vespucci fit into this debate?

By providing an historical overview of the Vespucci and an in-depth analysis of its structure, this chapter provides a systematic study of the family and constitutes the basis that informs the rest of this study: Vespucci artistic patronage, in fact, can be fully grasped only by simultaneously considering the history and activity of the three family branches. By drawing information from archival material and secondary literature, attention will be directed towards the most influential members of the three branches of the urban Vespucci, for which historical and biographical data will be provided. Although the focus will be on the generations of men and women active in the second half of the fifteenth century, consideration of Vespucci family members from the early Quattrocento is necessary in order to understand the lineage's historical and social development. Finally, some of the Vespucci wills I discovered in the State Archive of Florence will be used to show how inheritance practices can cast light on the relationship between individuals of different branches.

² GOLDTHWAITE 1968, 3-13 and 31-107.

³ KENT 1977, 293.

⁴ KENT 1972, 397-401.

⁵ CRABB 2000, 234-253. JACKS and CAFERRO 2001, 8.

1. From the *contado* to the city: The wasps of Florence

The Vespucci family originated in Peretola, a village situated in the Florentine *contado* eight kilometers north-west of Florence. Here the Vespucci were peasants, and worked as producers of wine. Towards the end of the thirteenth century some members of the family moved to Florence, where they settled in the *gonfalone* Unicornio (in the *quartiere* of Santa Maria Novella), a marginal area of the city which I will discuss further in Chapters 2 and 3.⁶ A glimpse into the origins of the Vespucci is provided in one of the genealogical trees of the *fondo* Pucci, preserved in the Archivio di Stato of Florence (Figures 5-8).⁷ While the tree is certainly the predominant element of both documents, attention should also be paid to the painted landscape. Throughout the sixteenth century it was common practice to enrich genealogical trees with visual indications of the family's origins and land possession in order to praise members's wealth and prestige.⁸ The landscape and buildings depicted at the bottom of the Vespucci genealogies must therefore be taken as meaningful landmarks for the family, and as an indication of the family's origins and identity. I believe that the slightly faded village outlined in the background of Figure 6 and the ecclesiastical structure placed at the bottom of the tree of Figure 6 are references to Peretola (Figures 7-8). Luciano Formisano identified the building as Ognissanti, the church of the *gonfalone* Unicornio next to which the Vespucci settled, arguing that the drawing reflects the original features of the façade of the Florentine church.⁹ In the *Map of Florence* engraved by Stefano Buonsignori in 1584, however, Ognissanti is represented differently from the church in the Pucci genealogy: it presents only one bell tower, the façade lacks an arched entrance, and there are no buildings positioned perpendicular to it (Figure 9). I believe a connection can, instead, be established with the Vespucci square in Peretola. The arcaded entrance of the church, its bells towers and the nearby

⁶ ARCINIEGAS 2002, 55-75.

⁷ ASF, Carte Pucci, 603. Unnumbered folios.

⁸ CHIOSTRINI MANNINI 1989, 15.

⁹ FORMISANO 1991, 77.

buildings seem to recall the church of Santa Maria that still faces the village's main square (Figure 10).¹⁰

A further element of interest in the consideration of family history is the coat of arms. The extensive use Florentines made of their coats of arms is exemplified by the presence of these heraldic symbols on the facades of public and private buildings; in funerary chapels; and on works of art. Heraldic studies have demonstrated that the employment of symbolic images on the coats of arms of Renaissance patrician families was not a new phenomenon but rather an ancient practice. Highly individual, heraldic devices differed from family to family, so that when displayed in private and public spaces, they acted as personal signatures, fostering family identification and perpetuation of its memory.¹¹ Although the extensive use families made of coats of arms in fifteenth-century Florence is undisputed, little interest has been devoted in art historical literature to the analysis of the symbols that appear within them. Highly individual, crests and emblems can offer interesting insights into family identity and, as the present work will attempt to demonstrate, heraldry can be the key to unlock controversial art historical issues.

In the Pucci genealogies the Vespucci coat of arms is represented hanging from the branches of the trees (Figure 11): the shield features golden wasps on a blue band in a red field. In the Renaissance, heraldic symbols were often chosen with overt references to the family name. In the case of the Vespucci, the name comes from *vespa*, the Italian word for wasp. This certainly explains the presence of small wasps on the family coat of arms that becomes an *arma parlante*, namely an emblem that represents the bearer's name.¹² A problem, however, has arisen in the art historical literature of Renaissance Florence. Some of the paintings commissioned by the Vespucci, such as Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* and Piero di Cosimo's *The Discovery of Honey* include depictions of little wasp-like insects within the narrative of the paintings. Scholars have been inconsistent in their terminology,

¹⁰ Today the church presents only one bell tower while the façade still features four arches above the entrance.

¹¹ BROGAN 1993, 1-13.

¹² For the notion of *arma parlante*: BORGIA and FUMI GAMBI GADO 1992, 213; BROGAN 1993, 4.

variously describing these insects as bees and wasps. This had led art historians to question the identity of the patron: if wasps are associated with the Vespucci, what do bees refer to? Although I will analyse the Vespucci artworks and their peculiar insects depicted within them in the following chapters, I shall here attempt to propose a solution to this problem.

I ran a survey on the visual employment of bees and wasps in Renaissance Florence by taking into consideration two areas of enquiry: fifteenth-century Florentine heraldic devices and paintings.¹³ What emerged was rather interesting. While wasps could only be found in relation to the Vespucci, bees could be found both in paintings and coat of arms, but only from the sixteenth century onwards. Francois Quiviger has shown how bees were often employed in visual and literary sources. Starting from the classical writings of Aristotle, Cato, Virgil, Pliny, and Varro, Medieval and Renaissance authors fostered the image of bees as loyal and industrious insects, endowed with architectural inclination and social organisation. Political and Christian writers variously employed bees as models of human society or in association to marriage and chastity. Poets linked the sweetness of honey to love. Honey also indicated virtue while the gathering of nectar from selected flowers became a metaphor for the acquisition of style in arts, letters and society.¹⁴ The relationship between bees and honey as the metaphorical expression of joy and pain (bees's stings) was visually expressed by Lucas Cranach in *Cupid complaining to Venus*, a subject that the artist took up from 1509 and frequently returned to from the late 1520s.¹⁵

Because of the positive values they embodied, bees started to be employed as heraldic devices by sixteenth-century families. Ferdinando I, son of the Grand Duke of Tuscany Cosimo I de' Medici, employed the bee as the new emblem of the

¹³ For Florentine coats of arms I used the following resources: BARBOLANI DI MONTAUTO 1999, passim; ORSINI DE MARZO 2005, passim; POPOFF 2009, passim.

¹⁴ QUIVIGER 2003, 317-319. A relationship between bees and imitation was drawn in PIGMAN 1980, 4-11, while the connection of bees and honey to love was formulated in BATH 1989, 59-94.

¹⁵ For the several versions of Cranach's *Cupid complaining to Venus* see: ZUFFI 2001, 60-62; HERRMANN-FIORE 2010, 99-113.

family. The most prominent example is Ferdinando's equestrian statue in Piazza Santissima Annunziata sculpted by Giambologna. The plinth presents a swarm of bees that together with the motto *maiestate tantum* bear a straightforward reference to the Duke (Figure 12). In the sixteenth-century bees were also adopted by the Barberini, who employed them as a symbol of good government and ideal society based on the values of community, work and discipline.¹⁶ The importance attributed to bees rather than wasps in art is also proved in the zoological study of Levi d'Ancona.¹⁷ The author was able to provide an in-depth analysis of the symbolic use of bees in both visual and literary sources: bees had been variously employed by writers such as Ovid, Pliny, Filippo Piccinelli, and St. Bernard with allusions to chastity, Christ's Resurrection, and in some cases with negative connotations related to the stinging nature of these insects.

Unlike bees, wasps are not linked to any symbolic value and their presence in Renaissance Florence is exclusive to the Vespucci coat of arms. It is difficult to make out from the coat of arms, discussed below, if the insects represented bear any of the real characteristics attributed to wasps. However one thing can be stated: stripy black and yellow insects in fifteenth-century Florence can solely be associated with the Vespucci. Waspy symbols featured in the family's private chapels in the church of Ognissanti, as Chapter 3 will show, and in the Florentine church of Santa Maria Novella on the funerary monument of Antonia Vespucci and Antonio Strozzi (Figure 13). The family emblem was painted on the first *folio* of the family's illuminated manuscripts (Figure 14) that, as discussed later, circulated within Laurentian humanistic circles. Wasps also appeared on the family's cutlery and, as I will discuss below, a silver spoon listed in the will of a family member was engraved with the Vespucci emblem. As Jacqueline Musacchio showed, cutlery was loaded with social connotations as forks, spoons and knives, generally commissioned for weddings, presented heraldic elements on their handles which

¹⁶ Bees can be seen on the Barberini coat of arms and on the tomb of Urban VIII realised by Bernini: LAVIN 2009, 955-1017; WOOLFSON 2009, 290. For the heraldic meaning associated with bees: FOX-DAVIES 2009, 260.

¹⁷ LEVI D'ANCONA 2001, 47-49, 223.

classified them as luxurious objects sought by Florence's elite.¹⁸ Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis also suggested that the presence of the family arms on cutlery 'point to the use of this ware at social occasions, as opposed to just household consumption'.¹⁹ The display of Vespucci cutlery in social gatherings would have, therefore, contributed to the circulation of the family arms across Florence, promoting the association of the Vespucci with wasps.

It is likely that the Vespucci crest was also displayed on the façade of the family's houses in the *gonfalone* Unicornio, but nothing has survived. Instead, wasps appear above the entrance door of Villa la Sfacciata, the countryside property that belonged to the family of Giovanni di Simone Vespucci since 1427 (Figure 15). Wasps can also be found outside of Florence, in those towns the Vespucci visited as ambassadors or *Podestà*. The coat of arms of Piero di Bernardo, *Podestà* of San Giovanni Valdarno between 1484 and 1485, is displayed there on the façade of the Palazzo d'Arnolfo (Figure 16), while that of Guidoantonio Vespucci appeared on the *Palazzo del Podestà* in San Gimignano (Figure 17).²⁰ Acting as a family signature of power, the Vespucci crest would have been widely recognised inside and outside of Florence, marking the presence of the 'wasps of Florence' across the city and its countryside.

When comparing the Vespucci family crests retrieved from archival material and published sources, it is possible to identify small but significant variations in the Vespucci coat of arms. The first change occurred in the 1430s when Alfonso V of Aragon granted Giovanni di Simone Vespucci the right to add the French lilies in the top right corner of the shield, following the ambassadorial sojourn of Giovanni in Naples (Figure 18).²¹ Another emblem adopted by the family is a black eagle holding

¹⁸ MUSACCHIO 2008, 34, 41-42.

¹⁹ AJMAR-WOLLHEIM and DENNIS 2006, 212.

²⁰ For the display of coats of arms on *Palazzi del Podestà*, in particular San Giovanni Valdarno: BORGIA 1986, 25-29, 108-109.

²¹ BALDINI 2004a, 103; CIABANI 1992, 672. Adding or partially changing heraldic devices was not uncommon in Florence. For example, in 1465, Louis XI of France granted the Medici family the right to change the chief *palla* to blue, charged with three French fleur-de-lis from the royal arms of France: BROGAN 1993, 181.

a scroll with the inscription 'in omnem terram'. An overt allusion to the voyages and discoveries of Amerigo the explorer, the eagle is represented flying above the family tree in one of the Pucci genealogies (Figure 19) and, as Baldini recorded, it was engraved on the tomb of the last descendent of the family, Amerigo Vespucci, in 1954.²² These major changes that appear on the Vespucci crest across the centuries can be linked to specific historical events, referring as will be shown to political alliances, family honour, and weddings.

It is difficult to determine whether individual family members were responsible for specific variations in the coat of arms they employed. Variations in a family coat of arms were not unusual. Discussing the emblems of Giovanni Rucellai and the Medici family, Francis William Kent argued that the variations in their coat of arms suggest that 'Florentines treated heraldry rather casually' and that the actual appearance of many emblems 'seems not to have been a matter of great importance'.²³ Roy Brogan, however, has shown how it is possible to distinguish members of the Medici family depending on the coat of arms they used. The Medici emblem consists of red *palle* and, depending on the number of *palle* placed on the shield it is possible to establish who commissioned what within the household.²⁴ Unfortunately, when applied to the Vespucci, the same process does not prove successful. Seven wasps generally feature on the coats of arms of the family, but there are cases in which a different number is represented. If we consider the crests mentioned above, ten wasps are displayed on Piero di Bernardo's coat of arms in San Giovanni Valdarno (Figure 16); three on Guidoantonio's coat of arms in San Gimignano (Figure 17); seven above the entrance door of Villa la Sfacciata (Figure 15); and nine in the manuscript's miniature (Figure 14).

The examples outlined here raise interesting observations, but they are not sufficient to prove the employment of different arms by specific family members, a conclusion which could only be drawn from a systematic study of the Vespucci

²² BALDINI 2004a, 112.

²³ KENT 1981, 201.

²⁴ BROGAN 1993, 185.

crests. Understanding if there was a consistent variation of the heraldic emblems used by family members might however shed light on family patronage, helping to connect works of art to specific family members. At the moment, however, this research will have to be limited to manuscripts as, as will be discussed in the following chapters, the few works of art known to be Vespucci commissions present 'loose' representations of wasps. Vespucci manuscripts often present slight variations of the family coat of arms included at the bottom of the first *folio*.²⁵ As the survey of Vespucci manuscripts and the cataloguing of different family arms (as well as those appearing in the *fondo* Ceramelli Papiani in Florence's Archivio di Stato) are beyond the scope of this thesis, this study will be reserved for a future project.

2. Family structure. Working towards a new genealogy

In her study of the genesis of the genealogical tree from antiquity to the early modern period, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber expressed the metaphorical links between a family and a tree: both are born, flourish, branch out, and wither.²⁶ Images of trees have been employed since ancient times to express the organic structure of a lineage, showing family lineage, generations, and relationships. The genealogical trees preserved in the Archivio di Stato of Florence are an invaluable source to gain an insight into the structure and history of the Vespucci family. The examples of the *fondo* Pucci, in fact, offer detailed information about family descendants, including the civic offices some of them held (Figures 5-6).²⁷ In her study of the Davanzati family, Anna Chiostrini Mannini explained the use of coloured hats in genealogical studies as a way to identify the offices held by family members: prior; *gonfaloniere*; *prelato*; knight and Count.²⁸ In the same way the coloured hats represented in the Vespucci genealogical trees, together with the information retrieved from the Carte Sebregondi and the Carte Passerini, offer an insight into the offices held by the family members: from 1348 al 1531 the Vespucci

²⁵ See for instance: BNCf, Magliab. A 14, f.2r

²⁶ KLAPISCH-ZUBER 1991, 105-129.

²⁷ ASF, Carte Pucci, 603. Unnumbered folios.

²⁸ CHIOSTRINI MANNINI 1989, 11-19.

had three *gonfalonieri di giustizia*, twenty-five *priori di libertà*; twenty-five members of the twelve Buonomini of San Martino, and twenty-one members of the *Sedici di Compagnia*.²⁹

Although looking at the *fondo* Pucci family trees could provide a sense of the Vespucci's history and family structure, these representations present inaccuracies and omissions which make them useful but not comprehensive historical material. The first issue is that the trees are only partially complete, as, like most of the genealogies realised in the seventeenth century, they do not feature the names of the female members of the family. The second problematic aspect is posed by the fact that the Pucci trees do not correspond with other genealogical studies of the Vespucci. The fascination that the life and travels of Amerigo the explorer held over the centuries resulted in a focus of attention on the original nuclear family of the navigator. Several genealogical trees were therefore drawn up, but little consistency can be obtained from their comparison.³⁰

The comparison of Vespucci genealogical trees and the *catasto* is the first step to overcome these inconsistencies. The *portate*, or declarations, submitted by the head of families to the Commune of Florence across the fifteenth century, included the names of those living in a given household (*bocche*), together with a list of properties and lands owned by the family.³¹ Just like genealogical studies, however, tax declarations are not without errors. Ambiguities that these documents raise include the exact number of family members within a household, their age, and the correct names.³²

²⁹ ASF, Carte Sebregondi, 5454, folder a. BNCF, Carte Passerini, 176 and 176bis.

³⁰ Fifteenth-century Vespucci genealogical trees can be found in ASF, MSS 353 (Carte dell'Ancisa), f.691v.; ASF, Carte Bardi, 88, folder 53; ASF, Carte Sebregondi, 5454, folder a; BNCF, MSS Passerini, 176, 176bis; ASF, Deputazioni sopra la nobiltà di cittadinanza 195, ff.185r-187r. For information about the 'Deputazioni' and the 'Libri d'Oro': BARBOLANI DI MONTAUTO 1999, 199-217.

³¹ The Florentine fiscal system in 1427 have been analysed by David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber in 1985. An online version is available at: <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/catasto/overview.html>.

³² Inconsistencies in the age of family members, in particular of Amerigo the explorer, have been pointed out by Ilaria Luzzana Caraci: LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 15.

Some family members do not appear in the family trees despite their presence in the *bocche* of the *catasto*. This is the case of Jacopo Vespucci, a difficult figure to pin down. While Albinia de la Mare records that he is the brother of Amerigo the explorer and son of Nastagio, Francesca Gallori and Simone Nencioni document that he is the uncle of Amerigo the explorer and brother of Nastagio, Bartolomeo, and Giorgio Antonio.³³

Further confusion is generated by the different names under which family members are listed. This is the case of the three daughters of Giovanni di Guidoantonio Vespucci. While the *Decima Granducale* of 1534 refers to the girls as Giovanna, Costanza, and Margherita, secondary literature provides different names: a discrepancy that can probably be blamed on scholars's misspelling of the archival material.³⁴ These discrepancies cannot be solved by looking at the Pucci genealogical trees as they mention male family members only.

A final problem is presented by those personalities who prove difficult to connect to the family, and they can be divided into three groups. First there are those who retained properties and lived in the *contado*, for which the urban records do not supply information.³⁵ The second group includes personalities who are difficult to link to the Vespucci lineage. This group includes Francesco d'Agnolo Vespucci: his *portate* can be found in the *catasto*, but establishing his relationship with the other branches of the family has proven problematic.³⁶ In the third group there are those family members who are referred to in the secondary literature, but are absent from the genealogical trees or the *catasto*. This is the case of Agostino

³³ DE LA MARE 1985, 447; GALLORI AND NENCIONI 1997, 177.

³⁴ ASF, Decima Granducale, San Giovanni, San Michele Visdomini, 3612 (1534), f. 138v. Alessandro Cecchi records the three daughters's names as Ginevra, Cassandra, and Margherita: CECCHI 2005, 365 n. 163. The genealogical tree published by Uzielli only records Costanza and Cassandra.

³⁵ Names and information concerning family members who lived in the countryside emerge from contracts that record the sale or acquisitions of lands between cousins. Similarly, the names of those who resided in the *contado* can also be drawn from tax declarations. Often the urban Vespucci of Ognissanti possessed *pezzi di terra*, or lands, in the *contado* that bounded with those of their relatives. See for example: ASF, Guadagni, 74, insert 3 and 4, unnumbered folios.

³⁶ Francesco d'Agnolo Vespucci tax declarations: ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicornio, 619 (1442), f. 867r.

Vespucci, of interest for his connection to Machiavelli and his marginal notes concerning Leonardo da Vinci on his copy of Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiare*.³⁷

For the purpose of this study, attention will not be paid to those members who lived in the *contado*, nor to Francesco d'Agnolo or Agostino Vespucci, whose political activity, dated in the sixteenth century, falls outside the chronological interest of this study. Instead, the analysis will consider the three urban branches of the Vespucci that were active in Ognissanti over the fifteenth century, namely that of Simone di Piero, Amerigo the Elder and Giuliano di Lapo. These three lines had a common origin, which can be traced to Vespino Vespucci. No information can, however, be supplied on Vespino as he is not mentioned in any archival or secondary sources.³⁸ The analysis of these lines will consider the family members set out in my modified genealogical tree (Appendix 1, Genealogy 1), which is the result of the integration of the data offered by the *catasto* and the existing genealogical studies. The presence of tax declarations submitted by the members of these three lines will also allow an evaluation of their presence in Florence, focussing on the most influential personalities, and context for their social and cultural activities.

3. The line of Simone di Piero Vespucci

Simone di Piero (13[??]-1400) offers an ideal starting point for the study of the Vespucci, as he is key to understanding how the family's importance in Florence was established in the late fourteenth century. An affluent silk merchant, Simone possessed a house in Borgo Ognissanti, a street located in the Unicorno, one of the

³⁷ SCHLECHTER 2008, available online: http://www.iaslonline.de/index.php?vorgang_id=2889. On Agostino Vespucci, his life and manuscripts: SCHLECHTER 2010, 151-173. For the list and full-text of Machiavelli's letters, included the correspondence exchanged with Agostino Vespucci: BONGHI 1996, available online http://www.classicitaliani.it/machiav/critica/Machiavelli_indice_lettere.htm. A research project entitled 'Agostino Vespucci, alias Nettucci: A new study through primary sources' is currently being undertaken by Dr. Gerard Gonz  les Germain at Villa I Tatti (2013-2014).

³⁸ Vespino is not mentioned in Passerini's *Memorie Storico Genealogiche della famiglia Vespucci*, BNCF, MSS Passerini, 176 and 176b. I did not engage in primary research on Bartolo Vespucci as this would have required the analysis of early fourteenth-century documents, which is beyond the scope of this study.

four *gonfalon*i of the *quartiere* of Santa Maria Novella.³⁹ Simone founded a hospital next to his house and a glimpse of the building is offered at the bottom of one of the Vespucci genealogical trees (Figure 20).⁴⁰ The building is recognisable from the inscription on the left of the hospital and the Vespucci coat of arms displayed on its façade. Established in the 1380s and named Santa Maria dell'Umiltà, the hospital was for pilgrims and for poor and sick men and women to be treated with secular and spiritual medicine.⁴¹ Simone was accorded financial help by the *Capitani della Misericordia* in 1388, and a letter by Coluccio Salutati was sent in 1390 to the Cardinal of Padua asking him to recommend Simone to the Pope.⁴² The Vespucci had in fact petitioned the Pope to allow him to erect two altars in the hospital. No information regarding the two altars survives and, in general, very little is known about the building. The richest source of information is Simone's will, drawn up in 1400 by Ser Paolo Nemi. In it Simone provided the hospital with eighteen beds; dictated that the hospital was to remain a lay institution and retain its name while managed by the *Compagnia del Bigallo*; and finally requested that yearly masses be celebrated on the anniversary of his death.⁴³ The building still stands today although it has been altered throughout the centuries.

Simone's hospital seems to have shared common features with similar structures built in the fifty years following the Black Death. According to the extensive studies of John Henderson, these small-scale structures were founded by members of patrician families and, normally located on the edge of built-up areas,

³⁹ Information about the life and the activity of Simone di Piero Vespucci between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century can be found in: LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, Folder 'Simone Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios. See also BALDINI 2004a, 84-85.

⁴⁰ Already identified and published in: DIANA 1999, fig. 17.

⁴¹ HENDERSON 2006, 43.

⁴² PASSERINI 1853, 395; LUCARELLA 1990, 22; HENDERSON 2006, 43. On Coluccio Salutati's activity as notary and chancellor in Florence: DE ROSA 2008, 33-39.

⁴³ After the death of Simone Vespucci the hospital was administrated by the *Compagnia del Bigallo* until it entered in the possessions of the order of San Giovanni di Dio towards the end of the sixteenth century. The building is now part of the Fatebene Fratelli sanitary structures. For the building history: PASSERINI 1853, 395-403; LUCARELLA 1990, 21-29; BALATRI AND CHECCUCCI LISI 2010, 22-28. For the role of the hospital in the following centuries and an inventory of its archive (1604-1890): SANDRI 1991, 1-22. For Simone Vespucci's will: FITTANTE 2010, 16-21. The archive of San Giovanni di Dio hospital is kept in Florence Archivio Comunale. It comprises 4054 documents spanning from 1604 to 1981.

they hosted between ten and twenty beds. Alongside their charitable and medical activities, these *spedali* offered honour to the patron and the city, as they were sources of local pride.⁴⁴ This not only sets Simone within a distinct group of wealthy male citizens involved in charitable activities, but also establishes him as the first family member through whom the importance of the Vespucci in the city was visibly established. Through the construction of the hospital Simone not only marked the presence of the family within the city, but also in the *gonfalone*. In 1383 he had tightened the links between the Vespucci and neighbouring families by marrying Giovanna di Francesco d'Amerigo da Sommaia, daughter of a well-established family in Unicornio district.⁴⁵ Moreover he was the first member to endow his family with a private chapel in the nearby church of Ognissanti. Located on the right side of transept, the chapel was built in 1376, as I will discuss in Chapter 3.

Simone is not the only notable member of this branch of the family (Appendix 1, Genealogy 2). His sons Giovanni (1389-1456) and Piero (1394-1450) both found their main occupations in the ambassadorial and maritime worlds. Piero, a *Console del Mare*, was involved in mercantile activities in Flanders with his business partners Giovanni Orlandini and, later the Borromei.⁴⁶ In Bruges the *Consoli* drew up the statutes for Florentine expatriates, recorded in 1426 by the Florentine notary Ser Filippo di Ugolino Pieruzzi.⁴⁷ Piero's passion for sailing and travelling was inherited by his son Bernardo who, in 1464, was the Captain of a Florentine galley that sailed to Catalonia and Sicily. It is interesting to note that one of the patrons of the expedition was Piero di Giuliano Vespucci, a relative belonging

⁴⁴ HENDERSON 2006, 34-69. For the Vespucci hospital and the way it fit within Florence's hospital network see in particular p. 43.

⁴⁵ BNCF, MSS Passerini, 176; RAZZOLI 1898a, 73-77; CIABANI 1992, 669-670.

⁴⁶ Francesco Guidi Bruscoli has highlighted the network established by mercantile Florentine families in Bruges in the first two decades of the fifteenth century. He mentioned a 'Piero di Biagio Vespucci' (GUIDI BRUSCOLI 2012, 22, 33, 40). I believe this Piero was the son of Simone di Piero, founder of the hospital. From archival material and genealogical studies a Piero di Biagio does not figure among the members of the Vespucci family. In all probability the name was not recorded properly in the documents consulted by Guidi Bruscoli. It is, in fact, not uncommon to find patronymic mistakes in relation to Vespucci family members within archival material. Moreover while Guidi Bruscoli states Piero died in 1425, Arciniegas records the date as 1450. What is certain is that Piero drew up his will in 1437. For the copy of the will: ASF, Guadagni, 74, Insert 1, unnumbered folios. For the activity of merchants and bankers: FRANCESCHI 2011, 37-45.

⁴⁷ MALLETT 1967, 74, 79, 104, 160, 167; GRUNZWEIG 1930, 110.

to the third branch of the family.⁴⁸ While Piero the entrepreneur travelled into Northern Europe, ambassadorial offices assured Giovanni a place in Florentine society and allowed him to travel across Italian courts such as that of Alfonso V of Aragon.⁴⁹

One of Giovanni's sons, Guidoantonio (1436-1501), followed in his father's footsteps and, interested in law and politics, he became one of the most prominent citizens of Quattrocento Florence.⁵⁰ Referred to as *cives et advocatus florentinus*, his name is linked to a wide range of events and social activities that shaped Florence's history and identity in the second half of the fifteenth century: in 1479 he travelled to the King of France with his nephew Amerigo the explorer; he was one of the ambassadors sent to Sixtus IV in Rome in 1480; his name can be found in relation to legal causes concerning the problem of illegitimacy in Florence; he was politically active when Piero de' Medici succeeded Lorenzo il Magnifico after his death in 1492; he was elected *gonfaloniere* twice; and fostered the expansion of the family by acquiring several properties within Florence, as the next chapter will discuss.⁵¹ Guidoantonio's son, Giovanni (1476-1549) received his education in the humanities at the University of Pisa, he was the *procuratore* of Lodovico Ariosto in 1513, and the ambassador of Leo X in Spain in 1513.⁵² He shared a property with his father Guidoantonio as I will discuss in Chapter 5.

Giovanni's second son, Simone (1437-1508) directed his interests towards the textile industry and the arts. Enrolled in the silk guild, together with his brother

⁴⁸ MALLETT 1967, 167.

⁴⁹ On Giovanni di Simone Vespucci: BALDINI 2004a, 58-59.

⁵⁰ Guidoantonio has never attracted scholarly attention despite the relevant political role this family member played in fifteenth-century Florence. For a brief documentation regarding his life and activity: BALDINI 2004a, 63-66. A larger amount of information, including transcriptions of documents and letters from the MAP, can be found among Arciniegas' papers: LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 2, 3, 4, Folder 'Guidoantonio Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios.

⁵¹ Guidoantonio Vespucci states that 'Messer Guidantonio, di poi andò ambasciatore in Francia' (ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicorno, 1010 (1480), ff. 41r-42r). Nastagio Vespucci also declared that 'Amerigho figliuolo di ser Nastagio, d'anni 29. È in Francia chon messer Guidantonio Vespucci inbascadore', LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 23. For Guidoantonio's mission to Rome: PLEBANI 2002, 167. For Guidoantonio's involvement in legal causes relating to illegitimacy: KUEHN 2002, 237-241. For Guidoantonio's election as *gonfaloniere* and for the civic importance he retained after il Magnifico's death and during the Medici exile: BALDINI 2004a, 66; BROWN 2011, 78-79.

⁵² LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 'Giovanni Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios.

Guidoantonio he owed *botteghe* across the city. The only surviving letter of Simone, sent from Milan on 26 February 1483, was addressed to Amerigo the explorer. The document indicates his good relationship with Amerigo, but also with Giorgio Antonio and Lorenzo il Magnifico to whom Simone wished to be recommended.⁵³ Simone possessed a property in the *quartiere* of Santo Spirito near the Ponte Vecchio, where his son Niccolò (1474-1535), Knight of Malta, later lived.⁵⁴

Simone and Niccolò seem to have been active patrons of the arts. Lodovico Ariosto, whom Niccolò met at the court of Ercole I in Ferrara when serving Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, lived in their house near the Ponte Vecchio.⁵⁵ This property also played host to Giorgio Vasari who, according to extant archival documentation, maintained a fruitful relationship with Niccolò.⁵⁶ Niccolò's various contacts with humanists and artists place him within the vibrant cultural environment of the early sixteenth century, fostering the possibility that he might be portrayed in Parmigianino's *Portrait of a Knight of Malta* (Figure 21), which shows striking similarities with the man depicted by Giulio Romano in *The Baptism of Costantine* in the Sala di Costantino, Vatican (Figure 22). David Ekserdjian was the first to underline the link between Parmigianino's portrait and the sketch on the *verso* of a paper in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. He also noted that the same man appears in *The Baptism of Costantine* by Giulio Romano although the position of the man conceals the cross that identifies him as a Knight of Malta.⁵⁷

⁵³ LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 28. For the original letter: ASF, MAP, 68, 57r.

⁵⁴ BNCF, Cl. 36 Cod 131 Magliab. Unnumbered folios.

⁵⁵ On the friendship between Niccolò Vespucci and Ariosto: CATALANO 1931, 396-400; VERDE 1972, vol. 3, 742.

⁵⁶ For Vasari's account regarding his stay at Niccolò Vespucci's house on Ponte Vecchio: VASARI 1967, vol. 6, 510-511. The documents that witness the relationship between Niccolò and Vasari are kept among the Vasari Papers at the Beinecke Library (Yale University). For an inventory of the Vasari Papers: BABCOCK and DUCHARME 1989, 300-304. Vasari also addressed a letter to Niccolò, published in BOTTARI and TICOZZI 1976, 1-5.

⁵⁷ EKSERDJIAN 2000, 37-42 and 2006, 138.

4. The line of Amerigo the Elder Vespucci

Little is known about Amerigo the Elder (1398-1472), a notary active in the first half of the fifteenth century.⁵⁸ Some scholars have speculated whether he could be identified as the Amerigo mentioned by Giorgio Vasari in his life of Leonardo da Vinci. According to Vasari, Leonardo, fascinated by the physiognomy of Amerigo, followed him through the narrow alleys of Florence until he managed to sketch his face.⁵⁹ Beyond this curious fact, all that is known about Amerigo the Elder is that he petitioned to have a private family chapel erected in the church of Ognissanti: precise instructions were left in his will, of which a partial copy has survived among the private papers of his son Giorgio Antonio.⁶⁰ In the will, written in 1472 by the notary Giovanni di Francesco da Firenze, Amerigo requested that a chapel was to be erected by his heirs, and that three masses per week were to be celebrated there for the soul of Amerigo and his ancestors. Amerigo's wish was fulfilled by his three sons: Giorgio Antonio (1434-1514), Nastagio the notary (1426-1482), and Bartolomeo (1428-c.1479).

This family branch (Appendix 1, Genealogy 3) was a renowned one. This line acquired increasing importance in the fifteenth century not only through the activity of Nastagio and Giorgio Antonio, but also through that of Nastagio's sons and grandsons, in particular Amerigo the explorer and Antonio. The latter was a well-known notary of Florence who drew up documents for many citizens including Sandro Botticelli and Lorenzo il Magnifico.⁶¹ While Chapter 3 will offer an introduction to the life of Nastagio Vespucci, attention here will be directed towards Giorgio Antonio, the most interesting member of this branch. Unlike its other members, Giorgio Antonio will be a recurring personality in my study, largely

⁵⁸ KECKS 1995, 99. For the protocols that record his activity: ASF, NA 21057-21062 [Amerigo Vespucci 1410-1468].

⁵⁹ DE TONI 1898, 6; VASARI 1967, vol. 3, 395.

⁶⁰ ASF, Corp. Sopp. 74 [San Domenico di Fiesole], 101, f. 5r. The document was partly published in SCHLEBUSCH 2009, 374.

⁶¹ Several references to Antonio Vespucci as the notary of Lorenzo il Magnifico in 1487 can be found in: ASF, Archivi delle Arti, del Disegno e della Camera di Commercio. Arte del Cambio, filza 104, ff. 20r, 21r.

because of the key intellectual role he played in Laurentian Florence. An introduction to the life of this fascinating personality is now necessary for a better understanding of the following chapters.

Giorgio Antonio has attracted the interest of scholars working in various fields, from the history of miniatures and manuscripts; Florence's schooling system; religious and artistic patronage; the formation of fifteenth-century libraries; Neoplatonism; and the production-circulation of maps.⁶² Karl Schlebusch recently attempted a reconstruction of Giorgio Antonio's life, but the information assembled did little to further knowledge of the important role of Giorgio Antonio within the Vespucci family; or to enable an evaluation of his influence in Laurentian Florence.⁶³ Although information about Giorgio Antonio can be attained from archival material and secondary literature, there are gaps in the knowledge of his life and activity, especially in the period between 1460-1476. In his youth, Giorgio Antonio worked as a copyist together with his brothers, an activity which began in collaboration with their neighbour Ser Filippo di Ugolino Pieruzzi, who often brought Giorgio Antonio with him to the Badia of Settimo, a Cistercian monastery outside of Florence.⁶⁴ Among the Florentine humanists that often visited the Badia there were Donato Acciaiuoli, Francesco da Castiglione, and the navigator Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli. With their different areas of knowledge and expertise, they are likely to have fostered Giorgio Antonio's interest in humanistic and scientific studies, making the Badia a key place for the education of the young Vespucci.⁶⁵

⁶² On miniatures and manuscripts: DE LA MARE 1973, 106-138; DE LA MARE 1985, 444-448; GALLORI and NENCIONI 1997, 155-359. On Florence's schooling system: VERDE 1972, 164-165. On patronage: HATFIELD 1970, 107-161; CADOGAN 2000, 217; CECCHI 2005, 341; O' MALLEY 2010, 15. On fifteenth-century libraries: ULLMAN and STADTER 1972, 38-43. On Neoplatonism: DELLA TORRE 1902, 606, 611, 622, 772-774, 22, 29, 37, 53, 348, 725, 726, 769, 802, 803, 809, 826; HANKINS 1991, 450, 453, 459, 465. On maps: GENTILE 1992, 194-195; PERINI 1993, 125-174.

⁶³ SCHLEBUSCH 2014, forthcoming. I thank Karl Schlebusch for sending me a draft of his article.

⁶⁴ GENTILE 1992, 194-195. For the connection between Filippo Pieruzzi, the Badia of Settimo, and the Badia Fiorentina: LEADER 2012, 96-97.

⁶⁵ The importance of the Badia of Settimo in Giorgio Antonio's education was already highlighted by Sebastiano Gentile: GENTILE 1992, 194-195. Ser Filippo di Ugolino Pieruzzi possessed mathematical-scientific manuscripts later bought off his heirs by Cosimo de' Medici: DRESSEN 2013, 11.

His activity as a scribe must have stimulated Giorgio Antonio's interest in manuscripts. The study of Francesca Gallori and Simone Nencioni, and more recently that of Nicoletta Marcelli, into Giorgio Antonio's activity as a scribe showed he possessed over 149 manuscripts that, spanning across various disciplines, included mathematical texts, philosophical treatises, works in Latin and Greek.⁶⁶ In his book on humanism and geography in fifteenth-century Florence, Sebastiano Gentile has located maps and manuscripts concerned with geography that belonged to Giorgio Antonio. Among the other works were Ptolemy's *Geographia* and Boccaccio's *De Montibus*, which shows Vespucci's interest in newly fashionable geographical sources.⁶⁷ Giorgio Antonio's manuscripts are today identifiable through their note of possession and, in most cases, through the miniature of the Vespucci coat of arms at the bottom of the first *folio* as seen in Figure 13.

After a documentary silence spanning the years 1460-1476, information about Giorgio Antonio finally appears in relation to his entrance in the Medici household as the private tutor of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici.⁶⁸ The decade of 1470-1480 is marked by a strong collaboration between the Medici and the Vespucci. During this period Giorgio Antonio entered Florence's humanistic circles, becoming a close friend of Ficino and those Medici associates who gathered around Ficino's 'Academy'.⁶⁹ A reflection of the predominant position Giorgio Antonio retained among the humanist's friends is offered by the dedication included in the edition of Ficino's comment on Plato's *Symposium* published in 1491. Here Giorgio Antonio, praised for his knowledge of Greek and Latin, is mentioned together with

⁶⁶ For a list of the books possessed by Giorgio Antonio: GALLORI AND NENCIONI 1997, 155-359; MARCELLI 2011, 5-7. For the interest and writings of Giorgio Antonio in ancient Greek: ROLLO 2005, 359-365. On Renaissance manuscript culture, the spread of ancient texts and illuminated books associated with the resurgent humanistic interest in Latin and Greek: BOVEY 2007, 93-129.

⁶⁷ GENTILE 1992, 65-72, 193-199-215-217. By possessing Ptolemy's *Geographia*, Giorgio Antonio proved to be aligned with the cartographic interests of the time. For the reception of Ptolemy's *Geographia* in the fifteenth century: DALCHÉ GAUTIER 2007, 285-364.

⁶⁸ SNOW-SMITH 1993, 69; BALDINI 2004b, 277-282; O' MALLEY 2010, 15.

⁶⁹ Extant correspondence proves the friendship between Ficino and Giorgio Antonio: *The Letters* 1975, vol. 1, 50, n.10; vol. 2, 28, n. 21, vol. 3, 8, n.5; vol. 4, 58, n. 43; vol 5, 32, n. 16; vol. 6, 7, n. 3. Vol. 6, 14-17, n. 10; HANKINS 1991, 429-475. Giorgio Antonio and Ficino might have also had the chance to meet at the Studio Fiorentino where Ficino taught: DAVIES 1992, 785-790. For Ficino's 'Academy': NESCA 1935, 57-89; KRISTELLER 1965, 40; BULLARD 1990, 467-492; HANKINS 1990, 145; HANKINS 1991, 429-475; HANKINS 2011, 31-46; MONFASANI 2011, 61-76.

only four other humanists, suggestive of the elite position Vespucci held within Ficino's circle.⁷⁰ Together with the other Medicean humanists, Giorgio Antonio shared interests in the Neoplatonic conception of love based on Christian and humanist ideas, as is suggested by the presence of Ficino's *De Amore* and *De Vera Religione* among the manuscripts Giorgio Antonio possessed.⁷¹

The year 1480 marked Giorgio Antonio's passage to a more spiritual life. Having declared his desire to be a cleric, he became canon of Santa Maria del Fiore in 1482; provost in 1488; and a Dominican friar, entering the convent of San Marco in 1499.⁷² No information has survived on the activity of the friar in San Marco and an insight into the life of Giorgio Antonio is provided by extant archival material, which I was able to locate in an overlooked *filza* in the Archivio di Stato.⁷³ One *folio* recorded the *conto*, or account, for the purchase of a manger and a rack in 1497. Meant to be for animals, no mention about their use or destination is given in the document. Another *conto* listed the products that the apothecary Morello sold to Giorgio Antonio in 1497-1498, including pills, almond oil, cordial, sugar, and marzipan. As I will discuss later, Giorgio Antonio had three wills drawn up between 1497 and 1499, but no information has been retrieved regarding the last years of his life, from 1500 to 1514.

5. The line of Giuliano di Lapo Vespucci

The line of Giuliano di Lapo Vespucci (Appendix 1, Genealogy 4) has normally been considered from the perspective of this branch of the family's relationship with

⁷⁰ 'Ne forte putes, amice lector, tantum opus editum temere, scito cum jam composuissem, antequam ederem, me censorem huic operi plures adhibuisse, Demetrium atheniensem, non minus philosophia et eloqui, quam genere athicum, Georgium Antonium Vespuccium, Ioannem Baptistam Boninsegnium, florentinos viros latine lingue greceque peritissimos; usum praeterea acerrimo Angeli Politiani doctissimi viri iudicio; usus quoque consilio Christophori Landini et Bartholomaei Scale, virorum clarissimorum', DELLA TORRE 1902, 606.

⁷¹ GALLORI and NENCIONI 1997, 155-359.

⁷² The self-declaration of Giorgio Antonio can be found in his *portata* of the *catasto* of 1480: ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicornio, 2448 (1480), f. 18r. Information relating to his entrance in Santa Maria del Fiore as a canon and, later, provost is published in: TREXLER 1978, 304-306. For the presence of Giorgio Antonio in San Marco: ULLMAN and STADTER 1972, 39; DE LA MARE 1973, 107.

⁷³ ASF, Conv. Sopp. 74 [San Domenico di Fiesole], 72. Unnumbered folios.

Simonetta Cattaneo, wife of Giuliano's grandson Marco.⁷⁴ Simonetta was an important presence among the Vespucci so she must have contributed to the spread of the fame and prestige of the family during her stay in Florence, as I will further discuss in Chapter 4. Investigation has, however, shown that the importance of the branch that Simonetta was part of is not simply linked to her role, but also to other influential members. The first is Giuliano Vespucci (1406-1466).⁷⁵ Politically active, the earliest information about Giuliano is related to his connection with the Borromei business *compagnia* in Bruges. Not only does this establish links between this family branch and Flanders, but also shows the overlapping interest of family members belonging to different branches: the Borromei Company was in fact the same one to which Piero di Simone was connected in the 1420s, as previously discussed.⁷⁶ Throughout the first half of the fifteenth century, Giuliano acquired noteworthy offices: *Console del Mare* in 1447; ambassador to Genoa and Venice and *Podestà* of Pistoia in 1459; member of the twelve Buonomini in 1460; *gonfaloniere* and *operaio* in Santa Maria Novella in 1462; founder of the third chapel on the left side of the apse in Ognissanti in 1476 where he was buried with his wife Bice Salviati.⁷⁷ The surviving letters of Giuliano in the Mediceo Avanti il Principato archive include correspondences with various members of the Medici household between 1459 and 1461. The close relationship that linked Giuliano to the Medici, to whom he wished to be *recommendato* in his letters, was inherited by his son Piero.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ On Simonetta Vespucci: BARFUCCI and BECHERUCCI 1964, 108-110; FARINA 2001, 10-37; TOGNARINI 2002, 10-43; LAZZI 2005, 220-226; VANNUCCI 2006, 265-269; LAZZI and VENTRONE 2007, 46,50, 89-96; ETTLE 2008, 3-10; LAZZI 2010, 12-37; PACINI 2011, 58-85; LUCHS 2012, 75-97.

⁷⁵ Information about Giuliano's life and career can be gathered from the papers of Germán Arciniegas in the Library of Congress: LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 'Giuliano Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios.

⁷⁶ For the connection between Giuliano and the Borromei company: ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicorno, 75 (1427-1429), f. 173r.

⁷⁷ Arciniegas records that when Giuliano was made *operaio* of Santa Maria Novella the major issues discussed at the time were the façade of the church (completed in those years by Leon Battista Alberti) and the restoration of the frescoes of the artist Orcagna left in bad conditions. LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, Folder 'Giuliano Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios.

⁷⁸ For Piero's letters: ASF, MAP, 20, f. 222r; MAP, 5, f. 754r; MAP, 6, f. 329r; MAP, 6, f.324r.

Piero di Giuliano (1432-1485) followed in the footsteps of his father, being politically involved in the city's affairs as a knight and captain of Florence's galleys. He corresponded with Giuliano de' Medici during his travels to Pisa, Constantinople, and Milan; and showed his alliance to the Medici's political and economic interests by arranging the marriage between his son Marco (1453-1497) and Simonetta Cattaneo.⁷⁹ As Ross Brooke Ertle explained, Simonetta's dowry included income generated from the mineral rights of an iron mine on Elba. The same terms were sought by Lorenzo il Magnifico in a dowry offered to his brother Giuliano by marriage to Semiramide Appiani, niece of Simonetta Cattaneo. Piero Vespucci, in all probability, sought to win an advantage for his patron through his marriage ties with Simonetta.⁸⁰ Close to the Medici and their entourage, Piero was a friend of Luigi Pulci and Benedetto Dei with whom he corresponded in the 1460s, as discussed in Chapter 2. The friendship that linked Pulci to Piero di Giuliano is evident in the *Giostra*, where Piero is recorded as participating in the joust of 1469, and in a letter that Piero sent to Amerigo the explorer.⁸¹ The letter, in which Piero asked Amerigo for Pulci's *sonetti*, proves the relationship between two members of different branches and corroborates Arciniegas's suggestion of the role played by Piero in the education of Amerigo as a navigator.⁸²

The good relationship between Piero and the Medici is witnessed by the help Lorenzo offered during Simonetta's illness: il Magnifico sent Piero his own doctor to attend Simonetta during her fatal decline. The 'myth' has Simonetta as the Platonic lover of Giuliano de' Medici who, when Simonetta died, was described by Piero as the saddest man in all of Italy.⁸³ The love felt by Giuliano for Simonetta was said to have nursed Piero's grudge against Giuliano and this was adduced by

⁷⁹ Information about Piero di Giuliano can be found among Arciniegas' papers: LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, Folder 'Piero Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios. The date of death remains unknown. For Piero's expeditions as the captain of Florentine galleys: PISANI 1923, 22, 116; MALLETT 1967, 71, 103; DEI 1984, 122, 137.

⁸⁰ ERTLE 2008, 4.

⁸¹ FARINA 2001, 32-33.

⁸² LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, Folder 'Piero di Giuliano'. Unnumbered folios.

⁸³ On the correspondence between Piero Vespucci and Lucrezia Tornabuoni: ERTLE 2008, 4-5; KENT 2009, 191. On the Medici's support throughout Simonetta's illness: ACTON 1979, 77; ERTLE 2008, 3-10.

Harold Acton as the reason for Piero's involvement in the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478. Having helped his friend Napoleone Franzesi to escape, Piero Vespucci was arrested, condemned to the Stinche, and set free only in 1480 due to the help of his friend King Ferdinand of Aragon.⁸⁴ During his incarceration his daughter Ginevra wrote to Lorenzo il Magnifico requesting Piero's release and, although her request remained unheard, it proves how family members sought to help one another for the sake of family prestige and reputation.⁸⁵ Piero Vespucci's connection with the Medici household is also evidenced by a letter Abbess Scholastica Rondinelli sent to Lorenzo il Magnifico in 1471, in which she thanked Lorenzo for enabling Piero Vespucci's daughter to profess at le Murate, the Medici's stronghold, presumably by arranging her dowry.⁸⁶

6. 'Last wishes': Wills, heirs, and family memory

Some of the examples brought up in the previous sections demonstrate the close relationship that linked Vespucci family members through generations. A strong sense of unity lay behind the varying degrees of social, political, religious and cultural collaboration of family members. As the analysis of the Vespucci family trees has shown, cohesiveness was also guaranteed by the use and re-use of the ancestors's names, which helped to consolidate the identity of the family and to preserve its memory. Despite some exceptions, most family members bore the same name: Amerigo, Stagio, Antonio, Simone, Piero, Bernardo, and Bartolomeo were among the most common. Antony Molho suggested that a major change in referring to a person's names had taken place in Florence during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. According to the author, the extension of genealogical memory to the level of the paternal grandfather had a double meaning. Maintaining the same names over generations on one hand helped to acquire a sense of lineage; on the other it signalled a change in the functioning of social memory as, for an

⁸⁴ ACTON 1979, 77. Napoleone Franzesi was a long-time familiar in the house of Guglielmo de' Pazzi: MARTINES 2003, 121.

⁸⁵ TOGNARINI 2002, 31.

⁸⁶ STROCCHIA 2009, 27. For the original letter: ASF, MAP, 27, 178 r-v.

individual, it implied that his public identity was tied to the memory of his ancestors.⁸⁷

Further understanding of how the Vespucci interacted with one another can be grasped by the analysis of extant archival material. The protocols of Antonio di Nastagio, notary of Florence who, like his father, worked for the Arte del Cambio, provide further evidence of the ties that linked the members of the three Vespucci branches. Antonio drew up documents for some of his relatives: among those examined for the purpose of this thesis, three featured Maria del Vigna, widow of Guidoantonio Vespucci, and one presented Giuliano Vespucci dividing the lands he possessed in Signa between himself and his brother. Antonio, moreover, teamed up with Guidoantonio and Giorgio Antonio to set up a business company, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.⁸⁸

Included in legal documents held by the Archivio di Stato, wills are an invaluable source in understanding the importance of inheritance to the Vespucci, and the role it played in determining family cohesion. In his seminal studies on legal aspects of Renaissance Florence, Thomas Kuehn has shown the vital role performed by law. Through the activity of notaries, law was an important means of preserving the identity of an individual and his family. Among the tools available, a pivotal role was played by wills that, drawn up for the sake of the family, maintained the memory of the testator through the survival of his belongings, and assured the continuity of the line.⁸⁹ Wills, as props to perpetuate family memory, met the need of the Florentines, who were known for having carefully recorded family-related matters in account books and private diaries, or *ricordanze*.⁹⁰ How then did the Vespucci fit Florence's general tendency of preserving family continuity through the passage of inheritance to individuals of direct bloodline?

⁸⁷ MOLHO 2000, 237-52.

⁸⁸ LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 'Antonio Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios. For the registers of Antonio Vespucci: ASF, NA 21065-21075 [Antonio Vespucci 1478-1532].

⁸⁹ For the use of bequests to members of the agnatic line: KUEHN 2000, 270.

⁹⁰ On the production of sources related to family memory and the role of *ricordanze*: CIAPPELLI 2000, 26-38.

This section will take into account the wills of the branch of which it was possible to locate the largest number: that of Simone di Piero, founder of the Vespucci hospital. The documents belong to Simone's descendants and, more specifically, to his son Giovanni and grandsons Guidoantonio and Simone, Giovanni's sons. The unpublished wills presented here were retrieved from the Gherardi-Piccolomini family archive.⁹¹ These documents are later copies of the original fifteenth-century wills: the names of the copyists are reported together with that of the notaries who had originally drawn the acts at the end of the will. By tracing the information provided by the copyist, it was possible to locate the original wills from the records of the notaries employed by the Vespucci.⁹² This was not done without difficulties. Guidoantonio and his brother Simone had the same notary who, in the copies, is cited under two different names giving the impression that two different notaries had been employed.⁹³ In the case of Giovanni di Simone, it was not possible to find the original testament. The notary's name corresponds to the Vespucci neighbor Ser Mariotto Bencini of whom several registers survive. However, the will of Giovanni Vespucci could not be found in any of these places.⁹⁴

⁹¹ FITTANTE 2010, 16-21. ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709. I am indebted to Rita Romanelli for having directed my attention to the *fondo* of the Gherardi-Piccolomini family.

⁹² The copy of Guidoantonio's will is in: ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, ff. 234r-236v. The original document is in ASF, NA 12702 [Giovanni di Guido Manetti 1487-1506], ff. 14r-15v. The copy of Simone Vespucci's will is in ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, ff. 239r-241v. The original will is in ASF, NA 12702 [Giovanni di Guido Manetti 1487-1506], ff. 118r-120v. Among the members of Simone di Piero's line, also the testament of Antonia di Simone di Giovanni was found (ASF, C. Strozzi., III serie, 122, ff.161r-164v). However it is not taken into consideration as, dated 14 May 1527, it is out of the time frame considered.

⁹³ In the copy of Guidoantonio's will it is stated that the document was originally drawn up by Giovanni di Guido Manetti. In Simone's will the same notary is named differently, recorded as Ser Giovanni di Francesco di Ser Saracino (ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, ff. 233v and 238v). The common practice of referring to notaries using their 'nicknames' not only generates confusion, but makes it difficult to locate the notaries who are listed in inventories with their official name. In the case of Giovanni di Guido Manetti the identification with 'Giovanni di Ser Saracino' is simplified by the help of secondary sources which identify him as the notary commonly called 'del Saracino': OUTI 1999, XIV.

⁹⁴ ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, ff. 227r-236r. Ser Mariotto di Giovanni Bencini is listed under the surname Baldesi this being the name through which the family was mostly known (see the inventory called *Appendice del Notarile*). This is confirmed by the study of Roberto Ciabani on the families who lived in the *gonfalone* Unicorn. For his historical background on the Baldesi-Bencini family: CIABANI 1992, 637.

The wills of Giovanni, Guidoantonio, and Simone provide little information about what the three men owned. In their wills, generic references are made to jewellery, clothes, and their fully decorated bedrooms. Giovanni Vespucci's bedroom comprised of decorated bed, a smaller bed (*lettuccio*) with a chest and other unspecified decorative elements.⁹⁵ The term *fulcitum*, often used in the document, is ambiguous and, in all probability, refers to the complementary objects commonly found in a room, such as mattresses and blankets. However, the possibility that painted furniture was included, as *lettucci* generally were, cannot be discounted.⁹⁶ Similar descriptions recur in the wills of Guidoantonio and Simone where chests, mattresses, and small beds are listed. Father and son followed the same testamentary pattern, bequeathing items to their wives and then electing their universal male heirs. Donna Antonia, wife of Giovanni, received clothes, furniture, 2000 florins, and was made usufructuary of all the movable and immovable goods until she died. Similarly Maria and Lucrezia, wives of Guidoantonio and Simone, were given furniture, clothes and jewels, over 1000 florins each, and properties and lands in the *contado*. In all the three documents, universal heirs were elected among the legitimate male sons (*filius legitimus et naturalibus*) as well as future male heirs. Although male members of the direct bloodline were the first choice, the testaments clarified who the inheritance was meant to be handed down to in case of a lack of direct male heirs. In Guidoantonio's will, for instance, it is stated that, subsequent heirs were those belonging to the family of his brother Simone; male heirs of the branch of Giuliano di Lapo were next followed by those of Nastagio di Amerigo.⁹⁷ The wills taken into account show how a general sense of family continuity permeated the male descendants of Simone Vespucci. The testators conformed to some of those inheritance tendencies already highlighted by Kuehn: testaments were used as

⁹⁵ 'lectum fulcitum cum cassapanchis lectuccio et aliis suis fulcimentis', ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, f. 227v.

⁹⁶ For the use and decoration of *lettucci*: BARRIAULT 1994, 28; PAOLINI 2004a, 67; AJMAR-WOLLHEIM and DENNIS 2006, 122-123.

⁹⁷ ASF, NA 12702 [Giovanni di Guido Manetti 1487-1506], f. 15v. Also Guidoantonio's father, in 1445, requested that goods had to be given to Giuliano di Lapo in case of a lack of male heirs in his line: ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, f. 228v.

powerful tools to control properties and heirs, to block alienations, and to preserve the memory of the family.⁹⁸ The Vespucci wills reflect a sense of family unity as they show the desire of maintaining personal possessions within the boundaries of the family, through the testator's branch or another one. This could perhaps be read as one of the strategies adopted by Florentines and, more generally, Tuscans that fulfilled the goal of family survival while maintaining identity.⁹⁹

While the testaments taken into account show the general practice of passing inheritance on from father to son, the three existing wills of Giorgio Antonio Vespucci offer an insight into the way in which a man without progeny would act when arranging his bequests. Previously cited and partly published, the wills have always attracted the attention of scholars for the information they provide on Giorgio Antonio's manuscripts and his artistic commissions to Botticelli, as I will discuss in Chapter 4.¹⁰⁰ The documents, however, have never been considered in terms of family identity, common possessions, and inheritance dynamics. Drawn up between 1497 and 1499, the three wills act as small inventories, providing accurate information on Giorgio Antonio's personal belongings.¹⁰¹ Lacking sons of his own, and with all his brothers dead by the 1490s, Giorgio Antonio left most of his possessions to his nephews and his nephews's sons. With them he shared a passion for books, scientific knowledge, and humanistic culture. The young Vespucci heirs appear to have been influenced by their uncle's wide range of interests and expertise, as similar intellectual interests appear to have been a prerogative of this family branch.

The will dated 15 May 1497 (Appendix 2, Document 1), attests that most of Giorgio Antonio's belongings had to be bequeathed to his nephew Giovanni, son of his brother Bartolomeo, canon of Santa Maria del Fiore. Among the objects given to

⁹⁸ KUEHN 2008, 15.

⁹⁹ On the strategies to preserve the family's memory and honour through testamentary bequests: KUEHN 2002, 138; KUEHN 2008, Preface, 21.

¹⁰⁰ DE LA MARE 1973, 110; LIGHTBOWN 1978, 17 n. 24; CECCHI 2005, 241-242.

¹⁰¹ The wills are respectively dated 15th May 1497, 23rd and 24th March 1499. These documents are in the registers of the notary Paolo Grassi: ASF, NA 10092 [Paolo Grassi 1494-1498], ff. 331r-334v; 346r-349r; 350r-v.

Giovanni there were a bed with a mattress; a rug; a *lettuccio*; several cloaks with hoods; and two silver spoons and a ring, on which featured engraved wasps.¹⁰² Giovanni also received religious texts such as the Bible, a small missal, and a book of hours, and was bequeathed an enameled chalice with a representation of Christ, the Virgin Mary, St. John (patron of Florence), St. Zenobius (patron of Florence's Cathedral), and St. George (an overt reference to Giorgio Antonio).¹⁰³ The will not only gives a sense of Giorgio Antonio's possessions but also attests to whom he believed it was worth bequeathing them. The election of his nephew Giovanni as the main heir might lie in the fact that, like the uncle, Giovanni was a canon of Florence's cathedral.¹⁰⁴

In the will of 23 March 1499 (Appendix 2, Document 2) the majority of goods are still bequeathed to Giovanni di Bartolomeo, but Giorgio Antonio also elected three sons of his brother Nastagio - Antonio the notary (1449-1534), Amerigo the explorer (1454-1512), Bernardo, and their future male descendants – as universal heirs.¹⁰⁵ They received several manuscripts, including geographical texts. Recent studies in Renaissance cartographic production have highlighted how the later purchase of maps by Amerigo the explorer, and later on by his nephews Giovanni and Bartolomeo di Antonio, demonstrate the persistence of the family's scientific and geographical interests through the generations.¹⁰⁶ The *ex-libris* of some of

¹⁰² On the use of rings engraved with a family's coat of arms, and examples of surviving ones: WARD 1981, 53, 86; AJMAR-WOLLHEIM and DENNIS 2006, 171.

¹⁰³ For a discussion of extant fifteenth-century Tuscan chalices: COLLARETA and LEVI 1983, 13-25.

¹⁰⁴ Studies on Santa Maria del Fiore in the fifteenth century have shown that canons and provosts came from some of the wealthiest families of the city. It was common practice that this office was held through generations, which explains why Giovanni Vespucci became canon a few years after his uncle Giorgio Antonio: DE LA MARE 1973, 107; ROTELLI 2005, 75. I was able to retrieve some overlooked archival material related to Giovanni di Bartolomeo: ASF, NA 15921 [Paganucci Giovan Battista 1501-1504], f. 7v. The *lodo* concerning Giovanni's inheritance is part of the Naldini del Riccio Archive of Florence (Archivio Naldini del Riccio, filza 62, folder 2). I am most grateful to Antonio Palesati and Rita Romanelli for having directed my attention to these archival sources. In the early sixteenth century Giovanni di Antonio became a chief navigator (*pilot mayor*) in Spain.

¹⁰⁵ The list of goods handed down to Giovanni is similar to the one in the will of 1497. However some items show that Giorgio Antonio must have changed his mind about the bequest. This is the case of the chalice: initially bequeathed to Giovanni, it was then destined to the family chapel in Ognissanti.

¹⁰⁶ Chet Van Duzer carried out a study regarding the maps that the members of this branch purchased and possessed. The author presented the initial outcomes of his investigations in the International Conference 'Mundus Novus. Vespucci: Ancient World and New World' in Lisbon (13th-

Giorgio Antonio's manuscripts show that he shared them with his nephews, which illustrated the way that the sharing and bequest of material goods functioned to preserve and 'pass on' an intellectual attitude.¹⁰⁷

A small digression is necessary here to consider the objects which once belonged to Bartolomeo di Amerigo the Elder, which are listed in an overlooked inventory dated 1479 that I located in the Archivio di Stato (Appendix 2, Document 4).¹⁰⁸ The document offers an invaluable insight into some of the Vespucci's possessions, but also provides further evidence of the family's inheritance practice. As mentioned above, Giorgio Antonio donated two silver spoons and a ring to his nephew Giovanni, all of which are said to have belonged to his brother Bartolomeo.¹⁰⁹ Although the inventory does not make overt mention of the ring, it can be hypothesised that the spoons were among the silver spoons (*chuchiai d'ariento*) found in Bartolomeo's house. When considered together, Giorgio Antonio's will and Bartolomeo's inventory create the assumption that Giorgio Antonio was bequeathed some of Bartolomeo's belongings in the 1470s which he then passed on to his nephew Giovanni two decades later, demonstrating the continuity they represent.¹¹⁰

The wills contain evidence about the objects which individuals owned, even though a description of them is not always offered. They also provide information about the personal networks the testators were part of, which not only helps to place the individuals within Florentine society but also allows us to gain a better

14th December 2012). The title of the talk was: 'New Insights on the Maps of the Vespuccis: Giorgio Antonio, Amerigo, and Giovanni'.

¹⁰⁷ In the comments of Petrarch's *Triumphs*, for instance, the possession note reports: 'Liber Georgii Antonii Vespuccii nunc vero ser Antonii eius nepotis et filiorum', BNCF, MSS. Magliab. VII, 1102.

¹⁰⁸ ASF, Corp. Sopp., 74, 101, I, ff. 42r-43v.

¹⁰⁹ '2 cucchiai d'argento coll'arme di Vespucci, che furono di detto Bartholomeo; l'anello d'oro fu di detto Bartholomeo intagliato 1 vespa coll'arme', Appendix 2, Document 1.

¹¹⁰ As I could not find Bartolomeo's will it is impossible to determine exactly what he bequeathed and to whom. The name of the notary who drew the inventory, and perhaps the will, might be on the *verso* of the inventory. The short sentence written on the back of the inventory, however, is nearly completely faded away and is unreadable.

understanding of the use of testaments as strategic family tools.¹¹¹ In the case of Simone di Piero and his male descendants, domestic objects form connections between the testators and the recipients, establishing links between past and future generations in order to preserve the memory of the family. All the testamentary bequests taken into account have shown that preference was given to members of the direct bloodline: Giovanni, Guidoantonio, and Simone bequeathed properties, lands, furniture, and money to their legitimate sons and daughters. Giorgio Antonio, lacking sons and brothers, decided to bequeath his manuscripts, clothes, and furniture to his closest relatives, his nephews.¹¹² In case of a lack of male descendants, inheritance could be handed down to individual members belonging to a different branch of the Vespucci family, showing a strong sense of wider family belonging. Through their bequests the Vespucci conformed to the common Florentine and Tuscan practice of inheritance that, as Thomas Kuehn noted, was the product of a group dynamic which served the goal of family preservation through the survival of a patrimony over generations.¹¹³

In other circumstances, testators also requested to have money or goods donated to hospitals, churches, and convents. In the will of Giovanni Vespucci the friars of Ognissanti were bequeathed vineyards; the nuns of San Pietro Martire received the properties and lands Giovanni possessed in San Alessandro a Giogoli; while further possessions in the *contado* were given to the nuns of Fuligno, located near the Faenza Gate within Florence's walls.¹¹⁴ Giovanni also left money to his father's hospital, requesting yearly anniversaries to be marked *in perpetuum* with masses and songs. Giovanni's bequest had a double impact. On the one hand it had

¹¹¹ The idea of testamentary strategy was already advanced by Catherine Richardson in relation to the testators' method of relating objects to a group of individuals. According to the author, this reflects the extent to which relationships are experienced in relation to the material culture of the household: RICHARDSON 2003, 434.

¹¹² The wills of Giorgio Antonio's nephews have not been retrieved except for that of Amerigo the explorer, drawn up in Seville on 9 April 1511: MAGGINI 2012, 199-213. The lack of these documents makes it difficult to understand the history of some objects that initially belonged to Giorgio Antonio.

¹¹³ KUEHN 2008, 1-19.

¹¹⁴ For the nuns, known as the *Monache di Fuligno*, and the convent of San Onofrio where they resided: THOMAS 2003, 156-191 and 361; STROCCHIA 2009, 24.

a strictly familiar dimension: by donating money to the Vespucci hospital Giovanni helped the activity of the family's institution, commemorated its dead founder, and consolidated the family presence in the *gonfalone*. Preservation of family memory and good neighborhood practice were also assured through the bequest to the Humiliati friars who governed the Vespucci parish church.

On the other hand, by endowing money to the Franciscan nuns of San Onofrio, Giovanni strategically projected the family within Florentine society, and enhanced its patronage opportunities in other parts of the city.¹¹⁵ The convent of San Onofrio, along today's via Faenza, is located in the *quartiere* of San Giovanni. In her studies on nuns and nunneries in Renaissance Florence, Sharon Strocchia has stressed how convents proved useful platforms for establishing social networks throughout the city: it was in fact common to find generations of nuns belonging to a family within the same convent. This allowed patrician families to build permanent links with those institutions. The lack of archival material makes it difficult to understand the reasons behind Giovanni's choice and it is not known if contacts with the Franciscan order and San Onofrio had been previously established by other members of this family branch. The visual evidence offered by Ghirlandaio's lunette in the Vespucci chapel, discussed in Chapter 3, suggests that a member of the family became a Franciscan nun: one of the Vespucci ladies, portrayed on the right side of the Virgin, is in fact represented wearing the conventional dress of the tertiary order. It should also be remembered that San Onofrio benefited from the patronage of the Medici during the fifteenth century.¹¹⁶ The Vespucci bequest to the convent might, therefore, be interpreted as a way to stress the family presence within the Medici sphere.

Guidoantonio copied his father in endowing money to the family hospital and to the Spedale degli Innocenti, the foundling hospital located in the same area as his property in via de' Servi. In the case of Giorgio Antonio, the movement of his possessions from the domestic to the ecclesiastical context establishes a connection

¹¹⁵ STROCCHIA 2009, 50-51.

¹¹⁶ THOMAS 2003, 361 n. 41.

between the familiar sphere and the spiritual one. Catherine Richardson noted that the bequests of personal items to churches suggest an interest in introducing personal objects into sacred space.¹¹⁷ The donation of Giorgio Antonio's manuscripts could perhaps be interpreted in the same way: manuscripts, with Vespucci's note of possession and coat of arms, marked the family presence in the religious space of churches and convents inside and outside of Florence: Santa Maria del Fiore; the church of Ognissanti; the convent of San Marco; the convent of San Domenico in Fiesole; and the convent of Santa Maria del Sasso near Arezzo. By choosing Ognissanti and Santa Maria del Fiore, Giorgio Antonio underlined his connection with his family church and Florence's Cathedral where he was commissioned as a canon; while the Dominican structures are linked to the last phase of his life as a friar of San Marco.¹¹⁸

The similar attitudes of Guidoantonio and Giorgio Antonio seem to reflect the common preoccupation of Florentines when facing death: the salvation of the soul. For most wealthy citizens this was guaranteed through the bequest of money to hospitals for the care of sick and poor people, and to ecclesiastical complexes.¹¹⁹ In the religious sphere, this attitude is witnessed by the remembrance of family members through the celebration of masses. In the will of Giovanni Vespucci, for instance, it is stated that money had to be given to the Humiliati of Ognissanti, in order to celebrate the anniversary of his death, as well as that of his father Simone. Moreover, from the *rendite* of the lands, they were asked to celebrate the feast of St. Andrew *in perpetuum* in the chapel of the testator, located in the church of Ognissanti. It is not clear, however, what kind of importance the feast of St. Andrew, celebrated on November 30, had for the Vespucci. It is possible that November 30 corresponded to the day on which either Simone or Giovanni passed away, but it was not possible to retrieve this information from the archival material consulted.

¹¹⁷ RICHARDSON 2003, 438.

¹¹⁸ For Santa Maria del Sasso, the Vespucci bequest, and the presence of the Dominican friars: GIORDANO 2000, 103-112; VERDE 2000, 77-88.

¹¹⁹ GAVITT 1990, 107-140.

A reconsideration of the genealogical and historical material related to the Vespucci has furthered our knowledge of this household, by offering an insight into the structure of the family, highlighting its most relevant personalities, and defining the relationships between family members. It has also clarified who the Vespucci were and the significant role they played in fifteenth-century Florence. The genealogical trees of the *fondo* Pucci provided not only a sense of the structure of the Vespucci family, but also initial information about its history and identity. The presence of the countryside village, in all probability Peretola, highlighted the rural origins of the family; while the presence of the coats of arms offered the possibility of investigation into the presence of wasp-like symbols inside and outside of Florence - suggesting that wasps were exclusively associated with the Vespucci and should, therefore, be considered the family's signature of power.

The different inclinations and interests of Vespucci members challenge the classification of this multi-layered and versatile family within a precise category: family members became ambassadors, notaries, teachers, doctors, churchmen, merchants, and navigators. The Vespucci cannot, therefore, be considered merely a family of merchants or bankers although some of them were entrepreneurs in the textile industry; equally it cannot be described solely as a family of navigators despite the important role Piero di Simone, Piero di Giuliano, Bernardo di Piero, Giovanni di Bartolomeo and, ultimately, Amerigo the explorer, played in sailing the world's seas; neither can it be defined exclusively as a family of notaries, doctors, or teachers despite the enrollment of several members in these fields.

Patterns of interest can be established when taking into consideration the individual branches. Giorgio Antonio's fascination with manuscripts and cartography might have played an important part in the education of some of his nephews. Similarly, Giovanni di Simone's concerns in the city's political and legal aspects might have influenced his son Guidoantonio and grandson Giovanni, both politically active in Florence. The legal career started by Amerigo di Stagio was later pursued

by his son Nastagio and his grandson Antonio. While forging their own careers, family members also shared different interests with their close relatives: notary of the Signoria, Nastagio di Amerigo shared with his brother Giorgio Antonio a passion for manuscripts and humanistic culture; and Amerigo the explorer while forming his personal interests in geography and discoveries, travelled with Guidoantonio on his ambassadorial mission to Paris.

The overlapping interests and close relationships demonstrated by family members can also be seen in testamentary bequests. The eligibility process defined by degrees of relationship suggests emotional vicinity among members of the Vespucci who considered themselves members of one family rather than of individual branches. The general tendency was to prefer members of the direct bloodline so that family properties, lands, and possessions were normally bequeathed from testators to sons, nephews and grandsons often including female members such as wives, daughters, and nieces. In case the line lacked direct descendants, however, members of other branches were made eligible for inheritance. An ancestor's possessions, passed on to different branches and transmitted from one generation to the other, were invested with symbolic values that did not act merely as a memento of the ancestor but, more generally, as a memento of the family's common origin and bloodline.¹²⁰

The behaviour of the Vespucci proves to be close to Francis William Kent's theory regarding the dynamic and behavioural patterns of the Florentine family, an aspect that will be addressed further in Chapter 2. As for other Florentine families, the Vespucci's attention to the male line, the security of the offspring, and the 'control' over the family through the celebration of masses for the testators's immortal soul, prove the close link that existed between the Vespucci individuals and the rest of the lineage. Extant letters and archival material demonstrate family cohesion, showing that family members relied upon each other, employing mutual support: Amerigo the explorer was educated by both Guidoantonio and Giorgio

¹²⁰ This concept was formulated by Anthony Molho in relation to family names rather than testamentary bequests, MOLHO 2000, 249.

Antonio; numerous Vespucci names can be found in the registers of the notary Antonio di Nastagio; and there are also friendly letters sent to one another by individuals of different branches, such as those of Giuliano di Lapo and Simone di Giovanni to Amerigo the explorer.

Most of all, the thin line between individualism and family cohesion that characterised the Vespucci household, finds visual expression in the Vespucci coats of arms. While wasps always feature as the emblem that proves which family an individual belonged to, the small variations within the coats of arms marked the identity of single family members. This behavioural pattern, which emphasised the identity of an individual and his line whilst maintaining a sense of family unity, is what allowed family members to affirm themselves during the fifteenth century, building a solid web of contacts in Florence and beyond, as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Networks and family status: Moving across the city and beyond

As historians of Florence have observed, fifteenth-century social interactions within the city were based on personal inter-family links that determined friendships, alliances, and patronage in its many guises.¹ Before considering the role of the Vespucci as art patrons and the use the family made of artistic commissions to express wealth and status, it is therefore necessary to examine the socio-historical context in which the Vespucci operated. As family members travelled widely across Italy and Europe for political and business reasons, investigation cannot be limited to Florence, but needs to encompass realities beyond the boundaries of city. This chapter initially investigates the family presence in Florence by considering the properties its members acquired, the connections it established with patrician families in the city and the *contado*, and the alliances it forged through weddings and selected friendships. I will then look at the activity of the Vespucci from a wider perspective, placing them within the broad web of connections that family members established in Italy and Europe. Analysing the social web and the regular travels of family members across Europe, moreover, will show that the Vespucci were some of the key players who shaped political, cultural, and intellectual aspects of Florence and Europe. Building upon Chapter 1, which underlined the close ties that existed between Vespucci family members, this chapter will also show how family unity was maintained beyond the walls of the family household. The awareness of being part of one large family, I argue, determined the nature of collaboration of the Vespucci within Florence: family members obtained prominent intellectual, political, and religious roles, affirming themselves in the city and shaping family identity.

¹ WEISSMAN 1982, 1-41; TREXLER 1980, 131-158; KENT 1995, 171-192; KENT 2009, 17-83.

1. Family properties in the neighbourhood, *contado* and the city.

In the fifteenth century, Florence was administratively divided into four *quartieri* and sixteen *gonfalon*i. The latter, functioning as administrative organs, were the basic units of civic organisation characterised by regular meetings organised and attended by politically active citizens.² As seen in Chapter 1, the Vespucci settled in the *quartiere* of Santa Maria Novella, *gonfalone* Unicorn (Figure 23), parish of Santa Lucia. Their houses were located along Borgo Ognissanti and via Nuova – now via del Porcellana - as it appears from *catasto* documents.³ Today it is not easy to understand precisely where, along these streets, the family houses were originally located. Not only did alterations take place throughout the centuries, but the Vespucci often moved from one property to another or possessed properties in which they did not live. This is the case of Nastagio Vespucci who initially lived in a house he rented from one of his neighbours; he then moved to a property which belonged to Guidoantonio; and eventually purchased a house which he rented out.⁴ Although it is hard to individuate single houses, conclusions can be drawn about the distribution of family members: while individuals belonging to the lines of Amerigo the Elder and Simone di Piero lived mainly along via Nuova, those of Giuliano di Lapo lived in Borgo Ognissanti. Members of a direct bloodline lived together: according to the *catasto*, it was common to find parents, sons, nephews, and grandsons all within one household. While maintaining a distinct separation of streets and houses, the members of the three Vespucci lines clustered together, shared the same *gonfalone*, the same neighbours, and the same church (Figure 24).

Social historians have focused widely on the way Florentine families acted within the neighbourhood. The studies of Francis William Kent stressed how families tended to remain within their ancestral *gonfalone* due to the tight ties that linked

² On the history and function of the *gonfalon*i: WEISSMAN 1982, 6-7; CIABANI 1998, 141-158; ECKSTEIN 2006, 219-239. For a list of Florence's *quartieri* and *gonfalon*i: CAROCCI 1909, 81-89.

³ For the line of Simone di Piero: ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicorn, 917(1469-70), f.188r; 1009 (1480), f. 366r; 1010 (1480), f. 41r. For the line of Amerigo the Elder: ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicorn, 917 (1469-70), f. 86r; 1010 (1480), f.18r; f.28r. For the line of Giuliano di Lapo: ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicorn, 918 (1469-70), f.221r; 1010 (1480), f. 405r; f. 417r.

⁴ For a transcription of Ser Nastagio's tax declarations: LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 13-19, 21-23, 100-102.

them not only to the members of their own family, but also to friends and neighbours, a close relationship well summed up in the commonly used formula '*parenti, amici e vicini*'.⁵ Brenda Preyer reached the same conclusion, as the analysis of palace acquisition and construction patterns of Florentine families permitted her to demonstrate that family houses were handed down from fathers to sons, and that parts of old family properties were often included in new ones. Having a palace in the *gonfalone* where the family concentrated for decades or centuries was a way of maintaining a connection with that living area, building inter-generational bonds with neighbouring families, preserving the memory of the family, and enhancing its status.⁶ The Vespucci however, appear to have been atypical. From the 1470s, in fact, the family started to expand across Florence, crossing the boundaries of their *gonfalone* and reaching out towards other areas of the city. A steady increase in the number of Vespucci properties can be registered from 1470, when houses can be found in the other three *quartieri* of Florence: Santa Croce, Santo Spirito, and San Giovanni.⁷

The property the family owned in Santa Croce was located along the still existing via dell'Agnolo. The lack of exact references about this building makes it difficult to physically locate it and all that is known is that one of the neighbours was Andrea del Verrocchio.⁸ Listed in the *catasto* of 1480 among the possessions of Guidoantonio and Simone Vespucci, the property was purchased around 1466 and sold to Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici in 1476.⁹ Difficulties also arise in relation to the property in Santo Spirito. Located next to the Ponte Vecchio, the house belonged to Simone di Giovanni. It is not known when the property was bought as it is not listed in the possessions of Simone and Guidoantonio, and there are no extant tax declarations related to this building. The only mention of it comes from

⁵ KENT 1978, 67; KENT 1987, 79-98; KENT and KENT 1982, 13-17; KLAPISCH-ZUBER 1985, 68-93.

⁶ PREYER 2000, 176-194.

⁷ The Vespucci expansion from 1470 coincided with that of the Medici who started acquiring lands in the *contado* from 1470: FOSTER 1969, 47-56.

⁸ Verrocchio's house would have been located at the corner between the modern via dell'Agnolo and via de' Macci: ADORNO 1991, 8.

⁹ ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicornio, 917 (1470), ff. 447r-449r. ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicornio, 1010 (1480), ff. 41r-42r.

secondary literature and Simone's will. As previously mentioned, Vasari recalled being hosted in the house of Niccolò Vespucci, knight of Malta, who lived in a house in Oltrarno, in *coscia al Ponte Vecchio*. The only information provided by Vasari regarding the house is a brief description of the fireplace, which Vasari described as being decorated by two terracotta heads. While one represented the emperor Galba, the other was a portrait of the emperor Nero. The latter, having entered Vasari's collection, is today in the Museo Civico di Arezzo.¹⁰ The house, mentioned in Simone di Giovanni's testament, but not in his tax declarations, no longer exists as it was destroyed during the Second World War (Figure 25).¹¹ The third property located outside of Borgo Ognissanti also belonged to Guidoantonio Vespucci. A former Medici property, the building was bought by the Vespucci in 1498. Handed down to different families, it eventually entered the possession of the Incontri family and underwent construction work from which the present structure resulted (Figure 26).¹² An in-depth analysis of this building and its painted cycles, attributed to Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo, will be provided in Chapter 5.

While expanding through the city, the Vespucci maintained a close connection with the *contado* where they had properties and lands. Through a careful analysis of the *catasto*, the historian Marco Conti was able to identify some of the houses the Vespucci possessed in the countryside. One of the houses belonging to the family branch of Amerigo the Elder was located in Peretola, a little village in the Florentine *contado*. The building still stands in via di Peretola 8 (Figure 27).¹³ Another property is the so-called 'Villa La Sfacciata' (Figure 28), which is visible today in via Volterrana 82, in the Giogoli area. The villa was listed among the possessions of Giovanni di Simone in the *catasto* of 1427 and that it belongs to this family branch is confirmed by the coat of arms that appears above the main

¹⁰ For the ceramic piece: DEL VITA 1919, 30-32; BERTI 1955, 28; BARONI VANNUCCI and SPERANZA 1999, 19. It is not known how the terracotta entered Vasari's collection. In all probability it was part of the goods that Francesco di Niccolò donated to Vasari. In the *Decima Granducale* of 1534, in fact, it is stated that the goods belonging to Francesco di Niccolò were in the possession of Vasari: ASF, Decima Granducale, SMN, Unicorno, Campione 3610 (1534), f. 295v.

¹¹ ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, ff. 239r-241v. DETTI 1977, 109-133.

¹² For the construction phases of the property in via de' Servi: CALAFATI 2007, 79-99.

¹³ CONTI 2010a, 279; CONTI 2012a, 101.

entrance: it features the Vespucci wasps and the Aragon vases. The villa was listed in the dowry of Ippolita di Piero Vespucci, bride of Bongianni Antinori in 1550.¹⁴ The third property Conti identified is located in the area of San Felice ad Ema.¹⁵ In the tax declaration of 1470 submitted by Nastagio Vespucci it is stated that in the *popolo* of San Felice ad Ema he had lands with *chasa da signore et da lavoratore*.¹⁶ The Vespucci property might have undergone construction works throughout the centuries as, according to Conti, it is difficult to see the original parts of the structure. The property today presents the Marzi Medici coat of arms. The Marzi Medici must have inherited the houses once they entered the Vespucci family in the sixteenth century, as will be explained later. The other *chase* and lands listed in the *catasto* have so far not been found. Their identification is complicated by the scant geographical indication provided by family members in their tax declarations which, in many instances, include only the name of the village or the parish.

Although fascinating, the identification of Vespucci buildings in the *contado* is beyond the scope of this study. In order to establish the presence of the family on the territory it is enough to consider the general areas where family members declared to possess houses and lands. Tracing the Vespucci possessions on a modern map of Tuscany reveals that the family had a strong presence not only in the city, but also in its surrounding countryside. Possessions are recorded in Brozzi, Signa, San Felice ad Ema, and Giogoli (Figure 29).¹⁷ The presence of *pezzi di terra* and *case da padrone* outside of Peretola, where the family originated, proves that the Vespucci adopted a similar acquisition pattern in the city and the *contado*: as

¹⁴ LENSÌ ORLANDI 1955, 221-222; CONTI 2012a, 105. Under the couple the villa was enriched by a Vespucci-Antinori chapel and an orangerie. Handed down to different families, the villa today belongs to the Lighting Academy Foundation. In September 2009, the 'Associazione Dimore Storiche Italiane' opened the villa to the public. For the practice of including country estates in women's dowries: LILLIE 2005, 14-16. For the *scritta matrimoniale* of Ippolita Vespucci and Bongianni Antinori: ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini 709, ff. 143r-v.

¹⁵ CONTI 2012a, 103-104; LENSÌ ORLANDI 1955, 188; UNKNOWN 1964, 68-77.

¹⁶ For the terminology: LILLIE 2005, 58-60.

¹⁷ On the map, properties are indicated with blue dots (lands) and red ones (houses). The dots do not show the number of houses or pieces of lands possessed. Similarly, the map does not indicate which family branch had properties in those areas, being the intention of the study a general consideration of the Vespucci presence in the territory across the fifteenth century. Among the Vespucci country houses identified by Marco Conti there is also the one in San Martino in Brozzi: CONTI 2012a, 102.

they overcame the boundaries of their *gonfalone*, they reached new lands outside of Peretola expanding towards populated areas on the north-west and south-west sides of Florence.

Historians have long recognised the importance that the countryside had in the Quattrocento, depicting it as a different, yet ‘urbanised’, reality to the city. The studies of Amanda Lillie have focused on the presence of villas in the countryside; the role that *luoghi*, or places, had in preserving the memory of the family; and the exercise of religious devotion in country estates through the presence of domestic chapels.¹⁸ By considering Pollaiuolo’s *Dancing Nudes* at Villa Lanfredini in Arcetri, Alison Wright shed new light on the form that artistic patronage assumed in rural sites; likewise Cecilia Hewlett focused on the experience of individual rural communities and the relationship they developed with the city of Florence.¹⁹ The strong presence of the Vespucci in Peretola, Brozzi, Signa, and Giogoli, brings into question not only the importance of the *contado* as a parallel entity to the city, but also the role it played in the Vespucci’s social growth, family belonging, and artistic patronage, as I will discuss in Chapter 3.

From a familial point of view, maintaining connections with Peretola would have fostered the preservation of family memory. By keeping (and inheriting) lands and properties, often rented to and from relatives still living there, the urban Vespucci were able to preserve a link with their ancestral roots.²⁰ Moving outside of Peretola the acquisition of places in nearby centres such as Brozzi, Giogoli, and Signa must have strengthened the family presence in the countryside, just as moving outside of the *gonfalone* Unicornio reinforced its social status within the city. Crossing the original geographical boundaries did not, however, preclude the Vespucci from maintaining links with their roots. In Florence, in fact, it seems that family members, despite their division in different areas of the city, remained close

¹⁸ Lillie’s study on countryside villas took into account a broad range of aspects spanning from the estates’s geographical location; the architectural features of the complexes; and their functions. See in particular the first part of the study: LILLIE 2005, 9-154. On the preservation of family memory: LILLIE 2000, 195- 214. On domestic chapels in country estates: LILLIE 1998, 19-46.

¹⁹ WRIGHT 1998, 47-77; HEWLETT 2008, 1-42.

²⁰ LILLIE 2005, 9-12, 39-40.

to the family hub. Not only did Borgo Ognissanti remain the place with the highest concentration of Vespucci properties, but was also the centre to which family members eventually returned. The analysis of extant wills dated across the fifteenth and seventeenth-centuries proves that most of the Vespucci requested to be buried in Ognissanti together with the rest of their family, as the next chapter will discuss.

2. Climbing Florence's social ladder: Friendship, wedding alliances and patronage

Studies concerning social interaction in fifteenth-century Florence have demonstrated that friendship formed the basis of civic relationships. In the work of Leon Battista Alberti and other Florentine writers, friendship was described variously as a survival strategy, and a mix of virtue, pleasure, and utility from which citizens benefited. The essence of Renaissance friendship was the obligation to assist one's friend in all his enterprises, and to marshal the resources of the entire friendship circle or patronage network – all the friends of friends – to intercede with the others on his behalf.²¹ Friendship was demonstrated in many ways: through the exchange of letters, written in accordance with rhetorical and social conventions; by the giving of gifts such as manuscripts and medals for tribute, consolation, or weddings; by building political alliances; arranging marriages; and by including portraits of friends in works of art.²² Beginning with the Medici in the first half of the fifteenth century, patronage was based on personal obligations passed on from one generation to another and its purpose was the pursuit of mutual honour and profit. This 'instrumental' friendship was a fundamental form of organization required to facilitate action in society.²³ In order to evaluate the complexity of the Vespucci social network and answer questions such as 'what friendships did the Vespucci establish?' and 'how did friendships affect the family's social position within Florence?' it is necessary to take several factors into account. Ties of blood,

²¹ The fourth book of Alberti's treatise *On the Family* is entitled 'On Friendship'. For a discussion of Renaissance friendship and the prominent role it had in Florence: TREXLER 1980, 131-158; KENT 2009, 17-83.

²² TREXLER 1980, 131- 158; WEISSMAN 1982, 1-41; SYSON and THORNTON 2001, 12; STREHLKE 2004, 64-65; MCLEAN 2007, 35-58; KENT 2009, 17-83.

²³ KENT 1978, 33-135; KENT 2009, 7; MCLEAN 2007, 35-58.

friendship, and patronage reveal different patterns of linkage but, if analysed together, they can give a sense of the social position the Vespucci had in Quattrocento Florence.²⁴

The point of departure for any type of social ties to be considered is the *gonfalone*, the place in which the city's families made their first step in climbing Florence's social ladder. In the *gonfalone* citizens sought political alliances and business partners, whilst establishing tight ties with neighbours and building friendships that often fostered further opportunities in other parts of the city.²⁵ One of the most direct ways to build enduring friendships and alliances was through marriages, as blood ties obliged relatives to assist one another. Marriages increased and consolidated a family's social position, and connecting to the right family became a fundamental strategy for Florentines.²⁶ Just like many others, the Vespucci forged initial bonds within the neighbourhood. It is difficult to understand the complexity of the Vespucci marriage pattern across the fifteenth century because of the large number of weddings contracted. A helpful, yet partial, instrument is one of the already mentioned genealogical trees of the *fondo* Pucci. Framed with twenty-one coats of arms, the tree provides information on some of the families to which the Vespucci were linked via marriage (Figure 30).²⁷ From a general analysis of the Vespucci marriages, it can be deduced that in the first half of the Quattrocento, influential members arranged weddings within the boundaries of the *gonfalone*. An example of this is the marriage of Simone di Piero to Giovanna di Francesco da Sommaia, and that of Bernardo di Piero di Simone to the daughter of their neighbour Mariotto Bencini, who appears as the Vespucci notary in several property transactions.²⁸

²⁴ For the need to consider several social ties at the same time: WEISSMAN 1982, 12.

²⁵ WEISSMAN 1982, 1-41; ECKSTEIN 2006, 219-239.

²⁶ FABBRI 1991, 34-54; MOLHO 1994, 233-297; MOLHO 1996, 39-70.

²⁷ The studies of Anna Chiostrini Mannini on the Davanzati family inspired the realisation of the graphic presented in Figure 30: CHIOSTRINI MANNINI 1989, 28, 100.

²⁸ A fundamental guide to understand the distribution of Florentine families across the four *quartieri* of the city is the study of Roberto Ciabani on Florentine families. For Santa Maria Novella and the *gonfalone* Unicornio: CIABANI 1992, 623-675.

Not all the weddings recorded in the first half on the fifteenth century, however, can be located within the *gonfalone* Unicornio or in the *quartiere* of Santa Maria Novella. Before marrying the daughter of Mariotto Bencini, Bernardo di Piero di Simone contracted a marriage in 1442 with Agnola, daughter of Luca Pitti, from the *quartiere* of Santo Spirito. In this instance two important families joined forces: Bernardo was the son of Piero di Simone, consul in Bruges in the 1420s, while Agnola was the daughter of Luca Pitti, elected *gonfaloniere* in the 1450s. Moreover, as Benedetto Dei remembered in his *Cronica*, the Vespucci and Pitti were amongst families who supported the Medici in the 1450s, illustrating the way in which alliances among the Medici partisans were encouraged.²⁹

Weddings celebrated in the second half of the fifteenth century reinforced the Vespucci's connection with influential Florentine families: Antinori, Canigiani, Capponi, Gualtierotti, Guicciardini, Nerli, and Strozzi, are some of the most noteworthy examples concentrated between the *quartieri* of Santa Maria Novella and Santo Spirito.³⁰ Although ties of blood offered support and fostered ones's prestige, the social success of the Vespucci cannot be limited to their strategic marriages. While in the first half on the century marriages enabled the family to gain prestige and reach the desired social reputation, towards the end of the fifteenth century they served as a means to consolidate the status they had already gained.

Most Vespucci marriages of the fifteenth century were stipulated with Florentine families, the only exception being the marriage between Marco di Piero Vespucci and Simonetta Cattaneo from Piombino. The presence of a non-Florentine lady within the family must have boosted the Vespucci's reputation in different ways. In fact, while building fame and reputation outside of Florence, the Vespucci

²⁹ DEI 1984, 66; KENT 1978, 60-61.

³⁰ In the first branch of the Vespucci, Simone di Giovanni married Lucrezia di Niccolò Gualtierotti in 1470; Antonia di Simone di Giovanni married Antonio Strozzi in the 1480s; Guidoantonio di Giovanni married Taddea di Simone Canigiani in 1465 and Maria di Alessandro del Vigna in 1470; Giovanni di Guidoantonio married Namiciiana di Benedetto Nerli in 1500; and Nanna di Giovanni married Luigi di Piero Guicciardini in the 1460s. In the third branch, Marco di Piero married Costanza Capponi in 1477.

also gained further importance within the city itself. Renowned for her beauty, Simonetta spread the name Vespucci within Medici circles and, therefore, across the wealthiest families of Florence.³¹ Judith Bryce noted that women, like monuments, were fundamental components of a city's honour or prestige, and, like them, could be pressed into the promotion of civic identity.³² I think this perspective could also be valid within the familial sphere: during the few years of her life, Simonetta must have played an important role in the enhancement of the Vespucci family.

Marriage was a means of procuring useful allies. Dale Kent has illustrated the ambiguities behind multiple marriages: marrying twice into the same house was, on one hand, a wasted opportunity to widen the circle of influential relatives while, on the other, another occasion to solidify existing bonds.³³ Several 'double weddings' can be registered across the three branches of the Vespucci. During the fifteenth century, ties were reinforced, for instance, with the Strozzi family. In 1457 Maria di Giuliano di Lapo Vespucci married Francesco di Piero Strozzi, and Antonia di Simone Vespucci married Antonio Strozzi in the 1480s.³⁴ The extant archival material related to the Vespucci-Strozzi union of 1457 corroborates the idea that marriage was an 'instrumental friendship' that served to establish alliances and obtain benefits among families. In the letter sent from Francesco Strozzi to Matteo di Matteo Strozzi, Giuliano Vespucci was remembered as being wealthy, caring, and a good relative to be treated well.³⁵ A 'double' wedding was also celebrated later in the sixteenth century with the Marzi Medici: Elisabetta Vespucci, daughter of Bartolomeo di Antonio di Nastagio, married Vincenzo Marzi Medici; and her sister

³¹ FARINA 2001, 74-99; RANDOLPH 2002, 194-210.

³² BRYCE 2001, 1073-1074.

³³ KENT 1978, 56.

³⁴ For the *scritta matrimoniale* of Maria di Giuliano Vespucci and Francesco di Piero Strozzi: ASF, C. Strozzi, III serie, 145, f. 40r. This document was partly transcribed and commented upon in FABBRI 1991, 103.

³⁵ 'Giuliano molto ci può ed è amorevole e buon parente e da farne gran conto'. The sentence seems to allude to the possibility of gaining favours and benefits from Giuliano Vespucci: FABBRI 1991, 103.

Fioretta married Vincenzo's brother, Michele Marzi Medici.³⁶ The inventories related to the Marzi Medici indicate that the family possessed properties in the *quartiere* of San Giovanni close to via de' Servi.³⁷ This shows that Fioretta and Elisabetta, although members of Amerigo the Elder's line, lived in the same area to which Guidoantonio moved in the 1490s, giving continuity to the Vespucci presence in this quarter of the city.

The Vespucci also forged friendships and established bonds with Florentine citizens through their active participation in civic events. The studies of Florence's social history have highlighted the long tradition of festivities that took place in the city throughout the year including the feast of the Magi, the Carnival, and the celebrations for the patron St. John the Baptist.³⁸ Bryce has shown how these celebrations were often accompanied by dances, which provided occasion for entertainment and encounters.³⁹ This is what must have happened in 1465 when Ippolita Sforza visited Florence, when games and dances were organised in the houses of Antonio Pucci and Giuliano di Lapo Vespucci.⁴⁰ As Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis discussed, dances and games were standard types of recreation, at the heart of Renaissance sociability.⁴¹ The fact that Giuliano hosted dances in his house for Ippolita Sforza, her entourage, and other eminent Florentine citizens indicates not only the prestige the Vespucci had gained by then, but also gives a sense of the social network they were part of inside and outside of Florence. Attention to social events was also paid by Giuliano's son Piero, variously involved in civic events that would have assured him and his family public visibility. Piero participated in several *giostre* and games that took place among young Florentine citizens: a letter Piero sent to Benedetto Dei in 1475 attests that he was about to

³⁶ The *scritta di parentado* that joined the sisters to the Marzi Medici is dated 15 January 1532 and is kept in the Marzi Medici Archive: ASF, Marzi Medici, filza 8, Registro 21, unnumbered folios.

³⁷ In the family archive were also found the inventories of the couples' possessions in 1534: ASF, Marzi Medici, 8, Registro 1 'Inventari Diversi', unnumbered folio.

³⁸ For the *feste* and celebrations organised in Laurentian Florence: TREXLER 1980, 215-278; NEWBIGIN 1992, 17-41; ORVIETO 1992, 103-124; VENTRONE 1992a, 21-53.

³⁹ BRYCE 2001, 1074-1107.

⁴⁰ BRYCE 2001, 1083; ROCHON 1963, 104. The importance that the participation in social events had for Florentine families was highlighted in relation to the Tornabuoni: PLEBANI 2002, 64-68.

⁴¹ AJMAR-WOLLHEIM and DENNIS 2006, 220.

attend a *giostra* for the *Festa del Carmine* in Santo Spirito (Appendix 3, Document 3); while in 1464 his name is listed among those who took part in a *brigata cavalleresca*, or knightly games, in front of the Medici palace. Organised and attended by filo-Medicean citizens, these events prove that Piero strategically worked to preserve the connections his father had previously established with the Medici and their associates. Furthermore, the Vespucci involvement in the chivalric games set up in Florence's public squares would have been noticed by the broad audience that witnessed these events and discussed the spectacle of individual prowess and familial prestige.⁴²

The Vespucci sought further connections throughout the city by entering lay confraternities - such as those of the Twelve Buonomini of San Martino and the *Compagnia de' Magi* – as well as humanistic circles.⁴³ At cultural gatherings, family members found occasion to establish and reinforce ties of friendship with their fellow citizens. Giorgio Antonio, for instance, built up a network within Florence through his active role as a leading humanist. As seen in Chapter 1, Giorgio Antonio possessed numerous manuscripts, some of which he shared with his nephews. His manuscripts also circulated outside of the family as the *ex-libris* formula 'Liber Georgii Antonii Vespuccii κάί των φίλων' ('book of Giorgio Antonio Vespucci and his friends') suggests.⁴⁴ Who were those friends Giorgio Antonio shared his manuscripts with? Although the names are not specified, several clues have led me to identify them with humanists in the Medici circles. As seen in Chapter 1, Giorgio Antonio was a member of the Medici circle and the fact that he is mentioned in Ficino's letters and in his *Symposium*, suggests that he was a well-known personality among the Florentine humanistic circles. Giorgio Antonio also appears in Cristoforo

⁴² VENTRONE 1992a, 21-53; SCALINI 1992, 75-102; RANDOLPH 2002, 197-198; VENTRONE 2007, 18.

⁴³ The members of the three branches of the Vespucci family who entered the confraternity of the Twelve Buonomini were: Giovanni and Piero di Simone: 1425 and 1439; Simone and Guidoantonio di Giovanni: Simone – 1480; Guidoantonio 1465; Bernardo di Piero di Simone 1470; Battista, Marco, and Niccolò di Bernardo di Piero di Simone 1481, 1484, 1489. ASF, Carte Sebegondi, 5454 a, b. Giorgio Antonio was a member of the *Compagnia de' Magi*: HATFIELD 1970, 107-161.

⁴⁴ For this formula and other recurrent *ex-libris* used by Giorgio Antonio: GALLORI and NENCIONI 1997, 155-359.

Landino's *De Vera Nobilitate*, where he is one of the speakers of Landino's banquet.⁴⁵

Although scholarly attention has repetitively (and exclusively) focused on the 'lost library' of Giorgio Antonio, there is evidence to suggest that the possession and exchange of books among Florence's elite may have also included other family members. This is the case of a manuscript possessed by Vinainzio di Bernardo Vespucci, today in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana.⁴⁶ *Folio* 1r presents a dedication to Lorenzo il Magnifico and other unspecified *amici* who may be identified as the humanists of the Medici entourage. The inventory of Lapo Vespucci of 1424 tells us that over 70 books were scattered in his house, although there is no indication of their content.⁴⁷ Guidoantonio Vespucci amended a manuscript containing notes taken on lectures by Angelo Poliziano on Aristotle's *Ethics*.⁴⁸ Finally, a previously overlooked Vespucci manuscript is stored at the Biblioteca Nazionale of Florence.⁴⁹ Dated 1478, it contains Ptolemy's *Geography*. The manuscript bears a miniature of the Vespucci emblem comprised of the golden wasps and a white vase with flowers, which according to my discussion in Chapter 1, refers to the line of Simone, founder of the Vespucci hospital. As Brian Maxson has discussed, the possession and public sharing of books established and reinforced ties between members of the wealthy families of Florence, and simultaneously displayed a family's status and wealth.⁵⁰

Artistic patronage also fostered the creation of Vespucci social ties inside and outside of the *gonfalone*, an example of which is the relationship between the Vespucci and the painter Sandro Botticelli. The physical proximity of the Vespucci and Filipepi in Ognissanti, in fact, fostered a long lasting and fruitful friendship

⁴⁵ ROCHON 1963, 40; LANDINO 1970, 39.

⁴⁶ BML, Plut. 90 inf. 20. The manuscript was first mentioned in: LENZUNI 1992, 70. Vinainzio di Bernardo does not appear in any Vespucci genealogical trees or in the *catasto* documents. It may be a nickname used by one member of the family. I have therefore not included him in the new genealogical tree (Appendix 1, Genealogy 1).

⁴⁷ ASF, ASF, Pupilli Avanti il Principato, 39, ff. 256r-249r.

⁴⁸ MAXSON 2014, 166.

⁴⁹ BNCF, Magliab. A 14, f.2r.

⁵⁰ MAXSON 2014, 153-176.

between the two families.⁵¹ Botticelli established links with all three lines of the Vespucci, for whom he painted the *St. Augustine* for the church of Ognissanti, explored in Chapter 3; *Mars and Venus*, discussed in Chapter 4; and *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia*, analysed in Chapter 5. Artistic patronage is not the only aspect that is suggestive of the close ties and good relationship between the Vespucci and the painter. As discussed by Louis Waldman, the protocols that witness the legal career of the notary Antonio di Nastagio include several acts drawn for his neighbours in the *gonfalone* Unicornio. Botticelli featured among them. The artist and his family, in fact, visited the Arte del Cambio to have Antonio draw up business agreements for them and to record the names of the family's *procuratori*. Among the documents, one records that Botticelli nominated Benincasa di Giovanni Filipepi to collect the money the artist earned for the decoration of the Sistine Chapel from Sixtus IV.⁵²

The friendship between the Vespucci family and Botticelli seems to have also found fertile ground outside of the *gonfalone* Unicornio. The artist and his patrons were in fact part of the same social network, connected to some of the wealthiest families of Florence identifiable with the Medici partisans. As seen at the beginning of this work, O'Malley wondered if the Vespucci could have championed Botticelli across Medicean circles.⁵³ This assumption requires a more in-depth analysis as it presents potentially interesting considerations that could reframe our understanding of the position both Botticelli and the Vespucci enjoyed in fifteenth-century Florence. While O'Malley approached the Botticelli-Vespucci relationship from the artist's point of view, this study will tackle it from the patron's side.

Alessandro Cecchi traced the origins of the friendship between the Medici and Botticelli to a commission the artist was given in 1470. The panel representing *Fortitude* painted for the Tribunale della Mercanzia was commissioned from

⁵¹ In the *portata* of 1480, Mariano, Botticelli's father, declared he lived along via Nuova next to the house of Ser Nastagio Vespucci. The Filipepi dwelled in via Nuova at least from 1464, the year in which Mariano purchased his house in Ognissanti. Botticelli has his *bottega* along this street: CECCHI 2005, 19; WALDMAN 2009, 107; CECCHI 2010, 13.

⁵² The documents are dated 1490-1492: WALDMAN 2009, 107.

⁵³ O' MALLEY 2010, 15.

Botticelli by Tommaso Soderini, close friend of Lorenzo il Magnifico, and one of the four ‘operarii picture’ of the Tribunale.⁵⁴ It should however be pointed out that in the 1470s Tommaso Soderini not only had contacts with the Medici but also with the Vespucci. According to the recent studies carried out by Schlebusch on Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, Piero di Tommaso Soderini was one of Giorgio Antonio’s students.⁵⁵ Given the contacts the Vespucci established with the Medici at least since 1431, it could be hypothesised that Botticelli was sponsored in the Medici circles by the Vespucci: already friends of the Medici, family members would have had the chance to interact with the artist in the *gonfalone* Unicorn.⁵⁶

The analysis of the relationship between the Vespucci and Botticelli also allows one to speculate on the contact the family may have established with other artists in the city. Of particular interest is the role the Vespucci might have played as intermediary between Botticelli and Verrocchio. In the 1460s Botticelli worked in Prato with Fra Filippo Lippi who was in charge of frescoing the choir of Prato’s cathedral with the stories of St. John the Baptist and St. Stephen. In 1466 Fra Filippo left Prato and moved to Spoleto where he died in 1469.⁵⁷ It is possible that Botticelli entered Verrocchio’s workshop once he returned to Florence in the second half of the 1460s.⁵⁸ The *trait-d’union* between the two artists could have been the Vespucci who, as previously mentioned, possessed properties along via dell’Agnolo since 1466, next to where Verrocchio lived. The friendship with Verrocchio might also explain the patronage of the family of Domenico Ghirlandaio, as I will discuss in Chapter 3.

⁵⁴ CECCHI 2005, 96-100. Similar considerations also appear in ACIDINI LUCHINAT 2009, 19-21.

⁵⁵ SCHLEBUSCH 2014, forthcoming.

⁵⁶ The earliest letter from the Vespucci to the Medici dates 1431. Sent by Giovanni di Simone Vespucci it was addressed to Averardo de’ Medici: MAP, f. III, 203.

⁵⁷ HOLMES 1999, 118. For the collaboration between Fra Filippo Lippi and Botticelli: CECCHI 2005, 30-57. Scholars have never formulated a hypothesis regarding a possible friendship between the Vespucci and Fra Filippo Lippi although they were certainly part of the same social network related to the Medici family. As Chapter 1 showed, the Vespucci maintained connections with the Medici since the first half of the fifteenth century and Fra Filippo Lippi was employed by the Medici since 1439: HOLMES 1999, 194. Ascertaining the friendship between them would further confirm the hypothesis of the Vespucci being the ‘sponsors’ of Botticelli even earlier than the 1470s.

⁵⁸ Alessandro Cecchi has speculated on the presence of Botticelli in Verrocchio’s *bottega*: CECCHI 2005, 44.

The arguments about the Vespucci connections within Florence presented so far accord with Ronald Weissman's theory according to which Renaissance social networks included many kinds of relations, among which there were ties of blood, friendship, patronage, and ties generated from social functions and rituals.⁵⁹ In line with Weissman's study, the analysis of Vespucci social links within Florence demonstrates how different kinds of relations coexisted within a family, showing how each type of social bond offered the Vespucci the occasion for expanding the family social networks beyond the boundaries of the neighbourhood where links originally started.

3. The European dimension of the Vespucci family

Already a popular pursuit in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, travelling played an important role in the lives of fifteenth-century Florentine citizens. Travelers included ambassadors, *Podestà*, students, bankers, and merchants. The latter, in particular, strengthened their activity in the Near East and Northern Europe following the expansion of the markets, the increase of goods demand, and the possibility of undertaking regular voyages due to the state-controlled galley system launched by Florence at the beginning of the fifteenth century.⁶⁰ Just like the Florentine Portinari, Datini, Tani, and Tornabuoni families, the Vespucci travelled widely: the commercial and political activities of the family were not limited to Florence and Italy, but encompassed European countries where they started travelling to as early as 1395. As mentioned in Chapter 1, family members engaged in mercantile and business activities in London and Bruges, and travelled in the Mediterranean towards the Middle East where they arrived in Constantinople and Greece, like Girolamo di Nastagio who lived in Rhodes from where he corresponded with his family in 1488.⁶¹ Ambassadorial offices also required the Vespucci to travel across Europe, as in the already mentioned case of Guidoantonio and Amerigo the explorer who travelled to Paris in 1479. Considering the activity of the Vespucci

⁵⁹ WEISSMAN 1982, 12 n. 24.

⁶⁰ GOLDTHWAITE 1993, 12-29. MALLET 1967, 19.

⁶¹ LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 30.

abroad not only provides further insight into the family's networks, but also offers another angle from which to consider its social status, artistic taste, prominent role as transmitter of knowledge, and its active participation in fifteenth-century cultural exchange.

Before considering the activity of those family members who travelled outside of Florence, attention will turn to Giorgio Antonio who established contacts with the rest of Europe from within Florence. The analysis of his life and activity permits us to evaluate his influence abroad, and the prestige of the Vespucci family inside and outside of Italy. Connections with influential European personalities can be traced back to Giorgio Antonio's youth and his initial teaching years. According to Karl Schlebusch, Giorgio Antonio hosted students in his house and never taught in Florence's university, the *Studio Fiorentino*, despite the tight friendship that linked him to some of its most active members.⁶² While the studies of Armando Verde and Schlebusch have provided information on the Florentine pupils of Giorgio Antonio, the same has not been done for those personalities coming from outside of Italy. Directing the attention to countries such as Germany, France, and Portugal can reframe our knowledge of Giorgio Antonio as a Florentine humanist, highlighting his 'European dimension'.

Throughout the fifteenth century, an increasing number of northern students interested in humanistic subjects travelled to Italy and attended Italian universities.⁶³ Some of the humanists and nobles who reached Florence came from France and Germany, countries that played an important role in the life of Giorgio Antonio.⁶⁴ The point of departure for understanding this close connection is Johannes Reuchlin. In 1482, while pursuing legal studies at the University of Tübingen, Reuchlin was nominated to be personal advisor to the Count Eberhard of

⁶² Some of Giorgio Antonio's students were professors and officials at the *Studio*. Among his students in the 1470s there were: Ricciardo Becchi; Giannozzo Pucci; Giovanni Ridolfi; Giovanvittorio Soderini; Marcello Vernacci; Antonio di Jacopo Lanfredini; Alamanno Donati; Piero Soderini. There were also Sigismondo della Stufa and Luca di Antonio Albizzi, both officials at the Studio. For information about Giorgio Antonio's first students: SCHLEBUSCH 2014, forthcoming.

⁶³ For the presence of European students in Italian universities: NAUERT 2006, 102-131.

⁶⁴ PIANI and BARATONO 2012, 82-83.

Württemberg. Together with the count he travelled to Italy where he was introduced to, among others, Marsilio Ficino who suggested that he study, together with his brother Dionysius and Johannes Streler, under Giorgio Antonio Vespucci.⁶⁵ Reuchlin must have been on good terms with the Florentine humanists of the Medici entourage, of which Giorgio Antonio was a member. Giorgio Antonio, together with Poliziano and Ficino, is in fact given special mention in Reuchlin's *De Rudimentis Hebraicis*, a work that witnesses the interest he shared in Hebrew with Giorgio Antonio.⁶⁶ Further evidence suggests that Giorgio Antonio's connection with German humanists was particularly marked. As Schlebusch has recently shown, in 1465 the German scribe and illuminator Joachim Rib from Rothenburg asked Giorgio Antonio to witness a notarial act.⁶⁷

René II Duke of Lorraine also travelled to Florence and studied under Giorgio Antonio Vespucci around the 1470-80s. The relationship between these two personalities has led historians to speculate on the possible exchange of geographical knowledge that might have occurred between them and that might have been brought to the creation of the Waldseemüller Map (Figure 31), named after its creator Martin Waldseemüller.⁶⁸ Dated 1507, the map features a portrait of Amerigo the explorer and Columbus and indicates the presence of a new ocean, the Pacific, and of a new continent, the Americas. This was the first map to represent the new continent, forever changing the understanding of a world hitherto divided into three parts - Europe, Asia, and Africa. How did the cartographer Martin Waldseemüller create this map? According to Arciniegas, the web of contacts between Giorgio Antonio, René II, Reuchlin, and the Count Eberhard are the key to unraveling the knot: Martin Waldseemüller was a member of the church of Saint-

⁶⁵ PRICE 2010, 17; O' CALLAGHAN 2012, 26.

⁶⁶ ARCINIEGAS 2002, 145.

⁶⁷ SCHLEBUSCH 2014, forthcoming. For the original document: ASF, NA 1843 [Bigliaffi Orazio 1480-1484] f. 229r.

⁶⁸ PIANI and BARATONO <http://www.mastromarcopugaciovff.it/Articoli/Teofanie4.htm>; PIANI and BARATONO 2012, 81-94. A Latin copy of the letter sent in 1504 by Amerigo to Piero Soderini reached René II which strengthened the relationship between the Duke and the Vespucci. For the transcription of the letter: LUZZANA CARACI 2007, 269-299. For the Duke of Lorraine, his education in Florence and the relationship with Giorgio Antonio: POULL 1991, 190-199; CASTRO 2008, 38-47.

Dié-des-Vosges which was protected by René II; and the Waldseemüller map was found in the Wolfegg Castle of Württemberg where Reuchlin and the Count Eberhard were from.⁶⁹ Information about the New World might, therefore, have reached Martin Waldseemüller from Florence through the network of Giorgio Antonio.

The unsolved problem behind the creation of the Waldseemüller Map remains the object of historical studies.⁷⁰ While connections between Giorgio Antonio, Reuchlin, and René II can be easily established, no information on the actual circulation of maps, letters, and geographic knowledge exists. Some historians believe that maps and cartographic material could have circulated within the Vespucci family and that other members might have been the keepers of the family geographical knowledge. On 12 May 1509 Zenobio Acciaiuoli sent a letter to Luigi Guicciardini, husband of Nanna di Giovanni Vespucci, Guidoantonio's sister. In the letter Acciaiuoli requested a *sfera* and a *globo* on behalf of the German Johannes Schöner from the city of Bamberg.⁷¹ The letter, while proving that geography was at the heart of Florentine humanist interests, also allows us to speculate on the possible passage of scientific and cartographic material within different members of the Vespucci family, including affiliates such as Luigi Guicciardini. Considered in the broader context, it suggests that the Vespucci had a leading role in the possession, exchange, and circulation of geographical knowledge which they, in turn, shared with prominent humanists from Florence and Europe. By placing the portrait of Amerigo and entitling his map *Universalis Cosmographia Secundum Ptholomaei Traditionem et Americi Vespucii Aliorumque Lustrationes*, Martin Waldseemüller stressed the importance of Amerigo Vespucci in the discovery of the New World.

Interesting connections seem to have also existed between the Vespucci and the Iberian Peninsula. This, however, has never received scholarly attention, with

⁶⁹ ARCINIEGAS 2002, 146-147.

⁷⁰ PIANI and BARATONO 2012, 81-94.

⁷¹ PIANI and BARATONO 2012, 83. For the original document: ASF, C. Strozzi, I serie, 137, f. 291.

Portugal and Spain only being considered in relation to Amerigo the explorer, who lived and worked in Seville and Lisbon until his death.⁷² Although Amerigo certainly maintained enduring links with both Spain and Portugal, it is worth considering the activity of other Vespucci members who established connections with those countries. It is likely that the merchant Piero di Simone reached Portugal and Spain as early as the 1420s: the Iberian Peninsula, in fact, was an obligatory stop for the Florentine galleys directed to the north of Europe.⁷³

The Vespucci may have imported and exported artefacts from those countries. Cristina Acidini briefly discussed the possibility that Botticelli's panel *Agony in the Garden*, now in Granada, was given by Amerigo Vespucci to Isabella of Castile as a gift.⁷⁴ Caroline Elam discussed how Lorenzo il Magnifico accomplished diplomatic ends through the recommendation of Florentine artists abroad. According to the author this brought honour to the Medici, but also to Florence.⁷⁵ A Vespucci gift to Isabella of Castile would have had a similar effect, highlighting the culture, taste, and refinement of the Vespucci while stressing the importance of a Florentine artist and the prestige of the city.

Vespucci wills, inventories, and other archival material also provide useful information. Bartolomeo Vespucci's inventory of 1479 (Appendix 2, Document 4), already mentioned in Chapter 1, listed among other objects thirty-three pieces of majolica and three pieces of coral with two golden crosses attached to them, in all probability intended to be used as rosary beads. In the Quattrocento the term majolica was used to indicate Spanish pottery that had reached the port of Pisa on Florentine galleys.⁷⁶ Although the Vespucci could have acquired Spanish maiolica pieces in Italy, where they had started to circulate, the possibility that some family

⁷² For Amerigo's sojourns in Portugal and Spain: FORMISANO 1991, 98-159.

⁷³ The ports of call changed from voyage to voyage, but among those in the first half of the fifteenth century there were Valencia, Alicante, Malaga, Cadiz, and Lisbon. Mallett's map illustrates the routes of Florentine galleys around 1447: MALLETT 1967, 90, 283.

⁷⁴ ACIDINI LUCHINAT 2010, 18. For the painting: Sandro Botticelli, *Agony in the garden* (Granada, Museo de los Reyes Católicos, Capilla Real) c. 1500. Egg tempera on panel, 53 x 35 cm.

⁷⁵ ELAM 1988, 817.

⁷⁶ For a brief history of Spanish majolica and its presence in fifteenth-century Florence: PAOLOZZI STROZZI and BORMAND 2013, 492-493; SPALLANZANI 2006, 9-14.

members had imported them from abroad cannot be excluded. Similarly, pieces of coral listed in the inventory were imported from Mediterranean countries.⁷⁷ The inventory of the house of Lapo di Biagio Vespucci, drawn up in 1424, already featured many luxury goods including pieces of majolica such as plates (*piatelli*) and lavish containers (*rinfrescatoio*).⁷⁸ It also demonstrated Lapo's interest in textiles, listing a wide range of garments and a rug coming from France (*tappeto francesco*). It is difficult to pin down what the latter was. The adjective 'francesco' indicates the French provenance, or manufacture, of the *tappeto*. As noted by Marco Spallanzani, *tappeto* is a problematic word: in the Quattrocento this term indicated both 'rug' and 'tapestry', and only information on the use of a given *tappeto* clarified its nature. Information on the use of the *tappeto francesco* are not provided in the Vespucci inventory, so the question of what object the word *tappeto* specifically refers to remains open.⁷⁹ Its presence in the Vespucci possessions might indicate the family's appreciation for French textiles, and the desire to show taste and refinement through the possession of an 'exotic' artwork. More research however, is needed in order to understand the use of the term *tappeto* and how common the circulation of similar French objects was within Florentine households. The most famous example of French influence over Florence appears in the Sala della Castellana in the Davanzati palace. The fourteenth-century fresco decoration of this room was based on the thirteenth-century French tale the *Chatelaine de Vergi*, known through the Italian version *La Dama del Vergiu'*.⁸⁰

The Vespucci were further involved in the shipping of foreign goods to Italy: Marco Spallanzani, for instance, recorded that the galley captained by Piero di Giuliano Vespucci in 1467 returned with six bales of rugs from the Middle East.⁸¹ The presence of luxurious objects among the Vespucci possessions, and the involvement of family members in mercantile activities, was not exceptional, but

⁷⁷ For the use of coral in devotional objects: MUSACCHIO 2006, 139-156.

⁷⁸ 'uno rinfrescatoio di maiolica [...] più stoviglie di terra [...] 3 piatelli di maiolica', ASF, Pupilli Avanti il Principato, 39, ff. 248r-v.

⁷⁹ SPALLANZANI 2007, 3.

⁸⁰ BRONWEN 2912, 610.

⁸¹ SPALLANZANI 2007, 101.

conformed to the activities of wealthy Florentine families. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, the participation of the Vespucci in the European web of cultural exchange not only reveals information about the family's social position, but also about its up-to-date artistic taste.

Giorgio Antonio also seems to have had contact with Portugal but, rather than travelling there, he took advantage of the Portuguese presence in Florence. Information retrieved from archival material and secondary sources, in fact, allows us to speculate on the possible contacts Giorgio Antonio had with the Portuguese who reached Florence in the fifteenth century. The studies on the Florentine Badia have focused on its Portuguese Abbot, Gomez de Ferreira, who gathered around him several fellow countrymen who soon became a strong presence in Florence's humanistic circles.⁸² Their activity was registered also in the Camaldolese convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli and in the Monteolivetan one of San Miniato.⁸³ In the latter, Alfonso Alvaro, the Augustinian Bishop of Silves, was in charge of the erection and decoration of the chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in the 1460s.⁸⁴ It is possible that Giorgio Antonio encountered these personalities at some point of his life: he was likely to have been introduced to Abbot Gomez de Ferreira by Filippo Pieruzzi who paid regular visits to the Abbot and his Badia; through Filippo or Vespasiano da Bisticci he might have also become acquainted with Alfonso Alvaro.⁸⁵ In her study of Portuguese patrons of the Florentine book trade in the fifteenth century, Albinia de la Mare explored the activity of the Abbot Gomez, of the Cardinal of Portugal, James of Lusitania and of Alvaro Alfonso, showing how they shared a strong interest in manuscripts and books.⁸⁶ Abbot Gomez purchased a great number of Greek and Latin manuscripts for the Badia, making it a very important centre for the Florentine book trade; the Cardinal of Portugal possessed a

⁸² BATTELLI 1938, 218-227.

⁸³ Archival material proves the friendship between Ambrogio Traversari, prior of Santa Maria degli Angeli, and Abbot Gomes who lent the Camaldolese and his monks several manuscripts. BLUM 1951, 22-23.

⁸⁴ APFELSTADT 2000, 183-223.

⁸⁵ Three of the subjects of the Lives of Vespasiano da Bisticci are Portuguese. As Alfonso Alvaro is included it is likely that Vespasiano knew Alvaro in person.

⁸⁶ DE LA MARE 2000, 167-181.

valuable library; while Alvaro obtained books for himself from Vespasiano da Bisticci.⁸⁷ Although Giorgio Antonio does not feature in de la Mare's study, he may have been part of the same Italian-Portuguese network: not only was Vespasiano one of his booksellers, but in 1476 Giorgio Antonio appears in a transaction of books for a certain Fernando from Portugal.⁸⁸

The common interest in manuscript culture that Giorgio Antonio shared with the Portuguese was most likely to have been linked to their common interests in geography and cartographic production. Sebastiano Gentile has shown that Giorgio Antonio borrowed manuscripts from the Medici library, including a *Geographia*.⁸⁹ The knowledge of Florentine humanists of geography and their circulation of manuscripts and geographical maps attracted the Portuguese: the navigator Paolo Toscanelli was well known in Italy and Portugal for his astronomical and mathematic knowledge and in 1459 Portuguese ambassadors arrived in Florence to see his globe. Toscanelli is also recorded with the Portuguese Fernando Martins in 1464 in Todi where they witnessed the will of Nicholas of Cusa.⁹⁰ In 1474 Fernanrdo Martins was the recipient of Toscanelli's letter regarding the way to reach India.⁹¹ In Florence, the Portuguese also sought artists: in 1461, for instance, Alvero Alfonso had maps painted by Piero del Massaio, an eminent miniature painter who worked in the Camaldolese convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli.⁹² From this brief discussion, it appears that Benedectine institutions such as the Badia of Florence, the Badia of

⁸⁷ For the Badia of Florence: LEADER 2012, 55-98.

⁸⁸ SCHLEBUSCH 2014, forthcoming. Schlebusch is the first to record the original document: Archivio dell'Ospedale degli Innocenti, *Estranei* 2740, f.87. The document, however, cannot be found under the given collocation. According to the archivist Lucia Ricciardi the progression number does not seem to correspond to any *filza* of the archive. Consulting the document would have been interesting for the scope of this study. Establishing whether the Fernando from Lisbon cited in the Innocenti book transaction corresponds to the Fernando mentioned in relation to the Florentine navigator Paolo Toscanelli would in fact corroborate the presence of Giorgio Antonio within a precise Florentine network. I am grateful to Lucia Ricciardi for her help and patience in trying to locate the document.

⁸⁹ GENTILE 1991, 42.

⁹⁰ GENTILE 1991, 34-35.

⁹¹ GENTILE 1991, 34-35.

⁹² GENTILE 1991, 38; DE LA MARE 2000, 167-181; BURKE 2013, 731. For Santa Maria degli Angeli as a vibrant humanistic centre that gathered influential personalities of Florence's elite since early fifteenth century: GENTILE 1991, 19-26; PONTONE 2010, 2-3.

Settimo, and the convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli retained a vital importance in the fifteenth century. Italian humanists, part of the Medici entourage, and their Portuguese fellows turned their attention to these cultural centres where great attention was devoted to cartography, science, and the production of manuscripts.⁹³

Relations between the Vespucci and Hungary also emerged. Evidence suggests that at least two members of the Vespucci family gravitated around King Matthias Corvinus, one of which was Giorgio Antonio. Whether the two men met in person is difficult to establish, but evidence suggests that a long-distance relationship might have existed between them around 1460-90. In a letter written in 1478 and addressed to Francesco Bandini, Ficino asked the Florentine to satisfy Giorgio Antonio's 'wish'.⁹⁴ While the document proves the contacts between Ficino and Giorgio Antonio and Bandini who resided in Hungary, it leaves several questions open such as the nature of Giorgio Antonio's request. It has been suggested that Ficino's recommendation might have been at the basis of a formal introduction of the Vespucci to Matthias Corvinus.⁹⁵ The letter is dated 1478, a period that witnessed numerous Italians travelling to Hungary in the hope of finding employment with the King and his Italian Queen, Beatrice of Aragon. This seems to have been the case for Bernardo di Nastagio, brother of Amerigo the explorer. Towards the end of the fifteenth century Bernardo was in Budapest working for

⁹³ On fifteenth-century Florentine humanism and the increasing interest in geography: GENTILE 1991, 12-45; BURKE 2013, 731. For the role of Camaldolese monks in copying maps: PIANI and BARATONO 2012, 87-88. Also Angelo Cattaneo, in his study of the Venetian map-maker Fra Mauro, stressed the importance of Camaldolese monasteries for the production of cultural works in the Quattrocento: CATTANEO 2011, 159-184. On the interest that the Portuguese paid to nautical astronomy during the fifteenth century: RANDES 2000, 46-57.

⁹⁴ 'Marsilio Ficino of Florence to Francesco Bandini: greetings. Giorgio Antonio Vespucci himself informs you by his letter in what respect he needs your assistance. Now this matter, Bandini, is as close to my heart as it is to his. For when mind is one, its purpose must also be one. But our Vespucci – you know what kind of man he is – is being more reserved in his request than he should be. And yet, even if he were to remain silent, in the opinion of impartial judges the man's remarkable integrity and learning is enough to make a vigorous request for anything and obtain it very easily. Therefore, although this man is, as you know, a very close friend, I recommend him to you not from his friendship, but for his excellence. For it is on account of excellence itself that he is a friend to us'. *The Letters* 1975, vol. 5, 32, n. 16.

⁹⁵ *The Letters* 1975, vol. 5, 103, n.16.

Chimenti Camicia, the chief architect of the Hungarian monarch. This is confirmed by two letters sent to his brother Amerigo in the period between 1480-1488.⁹⁶ Connections between the Vespucci and the court of Matthias Corvinus might have been fostered by the Medici circles. Recent studies have, in fact, proved the close relationship between the Hungarian King and the Medici and their entourage. Corvinus sought gems, cameos, and manuscripts in Florence and employed Florentine artists to go and work in his palace in Buda.⁹⁷

Further evidence suggests that the links between the Vespucci and Hungary did not only exist with Matthias Corvinus. A manuscript today kept in Munich, written in Florence around 1465-70, decorated in Hungary, and centred on the works of Cicero, presents the coat of arms of the Vespucci and Garazda families.⁹⁸ According to Albinia de la Mare, Giorgio Antonio knew the Hungarian humanist Petrus Garazda personally. Part of Matthias Corvinus's entourage through his patron, the bishop Joannes Vitez, Garazda travelled to Ferrara and Florence where he became a close friend of Bartolomeo Fonzio, Guarino, and Ficino. De la Mare furthermore recorded that Ser Nastagio copied a manuscript of Statius with the arms of King Matthias Corvinus, likely to have been decorated in Hungary. The material gathered proves that contacts between the Vespucci and Hungary started as early as the 1460-70s and continued in the 1480s due to the presence of Bernardo di Nastagio in Budapest.⁹⁹

The information gathered from archival material and secondary resources provided material to frame the Vespucci within a specific socio-historical background. Clustered in the *gonfalone* Unicorn from the thirteenth-century, the family started to expand across the city from the end of the 1460s, reaching out towards new

⁹⁶ FARBAKY 2011, 347, 353. The letters are published in: LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 33. For the original documents: ASF, MAP, 68, f. 185 and 208.

⁹⁷ On the relationship between Italy and Hungary in the fifteenth century: DANELONI 2013, 186-191.

⁹⁸ Albinia de la Mare advanced the hypothesis that the manuscript, with arms of the two families, could imply a marriage or record the gift from a member of the Vespucci to the Garazda: DE LA MARE 1985, 138. On the humanist Petrus Garazda see: BIRNBAUM 1973, 303-310; PAJORIN 2011, 118-123.

⁹⁹ DE LA MARE 1985, 447.

areas of Florence. In the period spanning 1470-1498 the Vespucci's presence can be registered in the four different *quartieri* of the city: crossing the boundaries of Santa Maria Novella, they initially reached Santa Croce and, later on, Santo Spirito and San Giovanni. The family expansion extended from the marginal areas of the *gonfalone* towards the centre of the city and power: in the *quartiere* of San Giovanni they eventually became neighbours of the Medici family with whom the Vespucci had maintained close links since the first half of the fifteenth century. A similar expansion took place in the *contado* where, exiting the small centre of Peretola where the family originated, the Vespucci acquired properties and lands in the areas located south-west of Florence such as Signa, San Felice ad Ema, Brozzi, and Giogoli. The expansion of the Vespucci into multiple areas of the city and the countryside does not seem to have negatively affected their chances of establishing bonds of a different nature. Florentine families tended to remain within the ancestral *gonfalone* over the centuries in order to preserve and strengthen the ties of friendship, patronage, and blood with their principal allies, their neighbours.

Contacts, initially forged within the *gonfalone*, were, later on, expanded outside of it. The influence the Vespucci gained within Florence and the *contado* through political offices and social involvement is mirrored in the marriages the family contracted over the century. While some of the initial weddings embedded the family within Unicornio - such as those with the Da Sommaia or Bencini families - later alliances were forged with families living outside of the ancestral district, such as the Nerli, Strozzi, and Capponi. Between 1468-1476 the union of Marco di Piero Vespucci and Simonetta Cattaneo consolidated the reputation of the Vespucci inside and outside of Florence: the wedding, benefiting from the Medici support, is in fact symptomatic of the prestige the family had gained in the city but also of the farsighted connections members envisaged to establish outside of Florence in order to consolidate the family's status.

Although the importance of the Vespucci family can be perceived in the first half of the fifteenth century, it is in the 1470s that the most successful period for

the family began: the Vespucci started their expansion within the city; marriages were contracted with some of the most influential families, often recognisable as Medici partisans. The social growth of the Vespucci also benefited from the involvement of family members in lay confraternities, such as the Compagnia de' Magi and the Twelve Buonomini, and from the connection with hospitals and monasteries: notable are the bequests of Giovanni Vespucci to the Franciscan monastery of San Onofrio; those of Guidoantonio and Giorgio Antonio to the Ospedale degli Innocenti and Santa Maria Nuova; and those of several Vespucci to the family church of Ognissanti. Also noteworthy is the record of Vespucci nuns in Florence's convents, in particular the temporary presence of Verdiana Vespucci at Le Murate, the Medici stronghold.

Connections within the *gonfalone* not only permitted the Vespucci to establish wedding alliances but also fruitful friendships that fostered the entrance of family members among the intellectual circles of Florence. This is the case of the friendship between Giorgio Antonio and his neighbour Filippo di Ugolino Pieruzzi. Through Filippo, Giorgio Antonio, initially active as a scribe in the Badia of Settimo, was introduced to the network of humanists, abbots, canons, and friars who, connected to some of the most vibrant humanistic centres of Florence, fostered Giorgio Antonio's passion for humanistic and scientific knowledge. Giorgio Antonio went further than that, establishing friendships with personalities from France, Germany, and Portugal. While actively involved in the manuscript trade centred around Portuguese and Florentine personalities, Giorgio Antonio gathered under his roof European nobles and humanists: Reuchlin, Renée II, and Eberhard of Württemberg chose Florence as the place to pursue humanistic and scientific studies. The letters of Ficino furthermore suggest that Giorgio Antonio was also acquainted with Matthias Corvinus and Hungarian humanists as the Munich manuscript with the Vespucci-Garazda coats of arms proves.

Interest in expanding the geographical and intellectual horizons also sparked curiosity among other family members. The activity of several Vespucci can in fact

be registered beyond the boundaries of Florence, encompassing other Italian and European cities. Political and mercantile reasons drove personalities such as Piero di Simone, Bernardo di Piero, Piero di Giuliano, and Guidoantonio Vespucci to reach, amongst other centres, Naples, Paris, Bruges, and Constantinople. Employment hopes brought Bernardo di Nastagio to Budapest where his links with Chimenti Camicia reinforced the connections of his family with the entourage of Matthias Corvinus. The European dimension of the Vespucci is furthermore witnessed by the presence of Amerigo the explorer in Spain and Portugal, where he lived and worked until his death. The Vespucci's activity abroad conformed to that of other prominent Florentines: like many other families they travelled across Europe; like the Medici they gifted their *amici* with paintings and manuscripts; and like other humanists of Florence, such as Ficino and Poliziano, Giorgio Antonio taught European personalities.¹⁰⁰ This shows that the Vespucci were among those who actively contributed to shaping Florentine culture and identity and the importance of their activities could be compared to those of Florence's elite. The gradual, but steady, expansion of the Vespucci reflects, therefore, the family's ambition.

The different paths pursued simultaneously by family members guaranteed the strong presence of the Vespucci within Florence, contributed to satisfying family power and prestige in different fields. The complexity of this process might be perceived when comparing the activity of the most relevant personalities of each branch: taking into account influential family members over the fifteenth century, the table in Figure 32 shows how three Vespucci generations increased the social position of the family (Figure 32). Whether a conscious or un-conscious plan, this contributed to satisfy two of the major preoccupations of Florentines: bringing honour and profit to the family. The Vespucci embody the characteristics of the fifteenth-century 'middle men' discussed by Alison Brown: go-betweens in the politics of the day, they were ambitious, eager to succeed, and often ambiguous in

¹⁰⁰ The activity of Angelo Poliziano and the international group of students under his tutelage is the focus of research of Dr. Laura Refe. In 2012-2013 Dr. Refe was a fellow at I Tatti with a project entitled 'Poliziano e allievi: una scuola d'eccezione nell'Europa umanistica'. This was followed by a fellowship at the Warburg Institute in 2013 with a project entitled 'The English pupils of Angelo Poliziano'. A monographic study is currently being prepared.

their behavior. Representatives of a new morality that “self-consciously juxtaposed public and private interests”, they expressed their ‘new’ status through gestures, clothing, and the visual arts.¹⁰¹

The analysis of the three lines of the Vespucci, therefore, proved to be in line with Kent’s considerations of Florentine family dynamics and behavior patterns as discussed in Chapter 1. The examination of family letters, testamentary bequests, tax declarations, social network, heraldic, political, and social choices, demonstrated that members of the Vespucci family shared common ideals, had similar targets and cooperated for the sake of the family’s status. The reputation the Vespucci gained cannot be considered the result of one outstanding individual but rather a group achievement derived from family cohesion and cooperation.

The ties established between members of the Vespucci family, their common social aspirations, and the friendship that linked them to Florence’s elite are fundamental aspects on which to base the analysis of the family’s artistic patronage, which will be explored in the next three chapters. The place where family unity, ambition, and civic identity are best represented is the site that the Vespucci chose as the stage of their artistic patronage and social visibility: the church of Ognissanti, object of the following chapter.

¹⁰¹ BROWN 2002, 113-142.

CHAPTER 3

Patronage and family cooperation in Ognissanti 1470-1480

The decade of 1470-1480 was a key period for the Vespucci family's history and artistic patronage and the place that embodies the family's development in those years is the church of Ognissanti (Figure 33). Having properties placed at right angles to the church, the Vespucci chose the building as the family's spiritual hub, erecting three private chapels and commissioning fresco decorations from Botticelli and Ghirlandaio. Ognissanti is the emblematic centre of the Vespucci's cooperation and aspirations: the Vespucci established their 'emerging' family within Florence's elite not only ensuring visibility through the involvement of its members in civic offices, but also leading a renovation of Florentine art and culture. Through the analysis of the Vespucci's presence in Ognissanti, the reconsideration of the family's chapels and artistic commissions in its sacred space, and the evaluation of the importance the church retained in the *gonfalone* Unicorno, this chapter will show how the Vespucci made use of art and culture to enhance the importance of the family and its neighbourhood, to project themselves within a precise group of families, and shape their identity as art patrons. Promoting new cultural activities, commissioning from young artists, and endowing the church with powerful and innovative images updated to the latest trends followed by the Medici and their intimates, the Vespucci displayed their wealth, status, and culture, fostered the honour and prestige of the family, and established themselves as trendsetters in Laurentian Florence.

Situated in the square of the same name on the right bank of the Arno, flanked by the two bridges Ponte alla Carraia and Ponte Amerigo Vespucci, Ognissanti has been generally neglected by scholars. The first study of the church was published in 1898 by Roberto Razzoli, and followed in 1992 by that of

Ferdinando Batazzi and Annamaria Giusti.¹ The reasons behind the scarce interest in the church might perhaps be found in the obscurity that surrounds the Humiliati order, founders of the church in the thirteenth century. When suppressed in 1571 much of the order's documentation was scattered and lost while its churches were turned over to other orders. Ognissanti, under the Franciscans, underwent severe construction works that altered its original aspect, modifying the internal architecture, and destroying and covering fourteenth and fifteenth-century depictions.² The papers concerning Ognissanti under the Humiliati, dating from the Middle Ages to the first half of the fifteenth century, were scattered across Florence and can today be found in the city's Curia Francescana, the Archivio Diocesano and the Archivio di Stato.³ Of those kept at the Archivio di Stato a good chunk is *alluvionato*, severely damaged by the flood that hit Florence in the 1960s.⁴ These patchy archival remains might have contributed to the lack of interest in the Vespucci chapels, along with the scant attention given to Ognissanti. The analysis of the Vespucci chapels, in fact, is complicated by the lack of organization of the existing records, and the lack of a Vespucci *fondo*.

Beyond archival issues, other reasons that can be adduced to explain the little scholarly attention raised by the chapels are the scant curiosity in deepening the study of the Vespucci beyond the life and travels of Amerigo the explorer; a lack of interest in the frescoes executed for the family by the young Domenico

¹ RAZZOLI 1898a, 8-77; BATAZZI and GIUSTI 1992, 15-97. Other publications about the church have focused on selected aspects of the building, mainly relating to its architecture: for the restoration of the façade of the church: VACCARO 2000, 3-23. For the architectural changes of the building: BARTOLI 2011, 5-64.

² The church today appears in a Baroque style. References to lost or conceived artworks can be found in relation to the Vespucci chapels as outlined in the following paragraphs of this chapter.

³ The Humiliati order remained in Ognissanti until 1561. Since then the church was taken over by the Franciscans who still govern it. When in 2003 the Minor Order moved to La Verna, the church archive was re-located to its current location, the Curia Francescana in Piazza Savonarola, Florence (ASPSFS). These events might have caused the loss of the original fifteenth-century *corpus* of documents that, today, cannot be found either in the Curia Francescana or in the ASF. For an overview of the Humiliati documentation survived: LAZZERI 1922, 69-83; MAIARELLI 2006, 3-271. I am grateful to Nicoletta Baldini for having helped me locate the Ognissanti archive.

⁴ This is the case of *filza* I, II, III of the *fondo* Commenda Covi relating to the activities of the Humiliati Order in Ognissanti throughout the fifteenth century. These *pezzi* are, at present, not consultable. The first indication of this *fondo* as related to the Humiliati of Ognissanti was given in: HUECK 1992, 49.

Ghirlandaio, works often dismissed in favour of the artist's mature endeavours in the Sassetti and Tornabuoni chapels in the Florentine churches of Santa Trinita and Santa Maria Novella; and the little attention the *gonfalone* Unicornio has attracted from social historians, who dismissed it as a marginal and poor area of Florence characterised by the presence of mills, drying sheds, and textile workers.⁵ What furthermore contributes to the fragmentary studies of the Vespucci-Ognissanti connection is the fact that only the chapel painted by Ghirlandaio has been taken into account, neglecting the others as if they were not worth consideration. The few existing studies, therefore, fail to provide a complete overview as they treat the church, the chapels, the Vespucci, and the *gonfalone* as single units that do not interact with one another.⁶ This unilateral approach offers an incomplete picture that limits our understanding of what is, in reality, a complex jigsaw.

Aiming to provide a comprehensive study of the Vespucci's artistic patronage in Ognissanti between 1470-1480, this chapter initially investigates the relationship between the Vespucci and the Humiliati. Discussing the possible common cultural, spiritual and commercial interests the family shared with the order, this part suggests how the good relationship with the order might have been at the basis of the family's extensive patronage in the church. The investigation goes on to consider the three family chapels, showing the Vespucci's common sense of ownership. Attention is primarily given to the chapel painted by Ghirlandaio where issues are raised when contemplating the identity of the sitters, the structure of the fresco and the genesis of its creation. Through examination of the style and typology of the decoration, links are established with northern European art, fostering considerations about the Vespucci's artistic taste and on the role of family members as commissioners between 1470-1480. The decoration of the church *tramezzo* is next taken into account: previous assumptions regarding a joint commission of the Vespucci family and the Humiliati order will be revised in light of

⁵ Previous studies mainly took into account the *gonfalone* of the Red Lion and of the Green Dragon: KENT and KENT 1982, Introduction; ECKSTEIN 1995, Introduction; CASALI 1985, 21-57. For a brief history of the area around Ognissanti: TROTTA 1988, 13-18.

⁶ RAZZOLI 1898a, 8-77; BATAZZI and GIUSTI 1992, 15-97; SCHLEBUSCH 2009, 364-374.

the visual evidence provided by the frescoes of the *tramezzo*. The last section of the chapter, finally brings together the considerations raised in relation to the Vespucci chapels and the *tramezzo* decoration, and discusses the use the family made of Ognissanti to foster their rise in Florence and forge their social identity within the city. The church will be considered in its wider context by taking into account the cultural innovations that characterised the *gonfalone* Unicornio in those years, showing the relevance this area of the city acquired in the second half of the fifteenth century due to the activity of the Vespucci family.

1. The Humiliati and the Vespucci. Commercial and religious common interests?

Originating in the north of Italy in the later twelfth century, the first Humiliati consisted of groups of men and women who lived together chastely and emphasised humility and simplicity through their work. They soon became active in the textile industry, especially in the making of wool cloth. Once in Florence, after they were given permission to build a church dedicated to All Saints (Ognissanti), they began acquiring large areas of land near the church, and controlled several commercial structures along the Arno, including mills and drying sheds used for cloth manufacturing. The Ognissanti monastery grew steadily, and by the early Quattrocento it was not only the largest monastery in the Humiliati order, but also one of the most prosperous structures within Florence, second only to the Badia in its wealth.⁷ As Julia Miller and Laurie Taylor-Mitchell noted, the dilemma that the Humiliati had to face was trying to reconcile their ascetic and humble way of life with the large incomes gained from their textile activity. On top of trying to minimise the conflict that these incongruities generated within the order, the Humiliati also lacked a sense of identity, missing the figure of a founder whose principles they could follow and identify with.⁸

⁷ MILLER and TAYLOR-MITCHELL 2004, 159-163. The Humiliati are mentioned as being among the first groups in Florence involved in textile production: TROTTA 1988, 16; MUNRO 2007, 111. For an account of the early Humiliati: ANDREWS 1999, 38-63.

⁸ MILLER and TAYLOR-MITCHELL 2004, 163.

The Humiliati's continuous involvement in textile commercial activities establishes a link with the Vespucci. Several family members had been enrolled in the silk and wool guilds since the thirteenth century.⁹ In 1476, Giorgio Antonio, his nephew Antonio the notary, and the cousin Guidoantonio, joined forces and created the *Compagnia del Mulino*. Mentioned in different archival documents related to the family, not much it is known about this *Compagnia* and it has not yet been studied.¹⁰ In all probability the *Compagnia* was similar to those family enterprises in the business of cloth manufacture that, since the Trecento, formed Florence's economic structure. The history and activity of former family partnerships such as those of the Peruzzi, Frescobaldi, Medici, Braccacci, Spinelli and Alberti del Giudici, have been reconstructed on the basis of extant documents, such as inventories, business records and account books.¹¹ The studies of Julius Kirshner have shown that family companies involved in the manufacture of cloth were formed for the sake of profit and in the name of God, and comprised of partners belonging to either the same family branch or different ones.¹² Partners owned *botteghe*, had employees, and often possessed their own mills and dyeing establishments.¹³

It is likely that the Vespucci's *Compagnia* was similar in structure and aims to that of other partnerships. The formula *Mulina d' Ognissanti* must have referred to

⁹ LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, folder 'Genealogy'. Unnumbered folios. Throughout the folder there are listed the names of those Vespucci enrolled in the silk and wool guilds from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century.

¹⁰ LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 'Antonio, Bernardo, Girolamo' and 'Giorgio Antonio'. Box 5, Folder 'Genealogy'. Unnumbered folios. Information is kept in the registers of Antonio Vespucci, member of the *Compagnia* and Florentine lawyer. His legal activity is witnessed by the 11 folders kept at the ASF in the NA. The name of the *Compagnia* is problematic: it appears variously named *Mulino*, *Mulina*, *Mulini*, and *Mulina d'Ognissanti*.

¹¹ For an attempt at reconstructing the activity in the cloth manufacturer's business of the Alberti del Giudici and of the Medici families: KIRSHNER 1974, 39-84 and 85-118. For an overview of the importance of Florence's family enterprises and their links to the city's economic structure: GOLDTHWAITE 1995, Ch. 3. For the Spinelli: JACKS and CAFERRO 2001, 1-51.

¹² While the original partners of Alberti del Giudici company were three brothers (in the fourteenth century), the company of Raffaello di Francesco de' Medici in 1531 included Raffaello's distant cousin Chiarissimo di Rosso de' Medici. Both the Medici and Alberti del Giudici also included outside partners. KIRSHNER 1974, 45 and 87. For how family structure affected Florentine firms: KENT 1977, 65-72. On family firms: GOLDTHWAITE 2009, 64-78.

¹³ KIRSHNER 1974, 47. In the thirteenth century the Frescobaldi and Tornabuoni families built their own mills along the Arno: TROTTA 1988, 16.

the mills placed along the Arno, a much sought-after location for the production of wool and silk since the thirteenth-century. The presence of fulling mills and dyeing establishments on both banks of the river - in correspondence to the *quartieri* of Santo Spirito and Santa Maria Novella - attracted over the centuries the interest of families and cloth companies, marking this marginal area a place where manual work and family business intertwined.¹⁴ Due to the lack of information on the Vespucci *Compagnia*, it is not possible to consider the role and influence the enterprise had in the city, or how it developed as a family business. According to archival documents, the so-called *parti* of the *Compagnia* were handed down to family members through wills and, in some cases, they were also left to the friars of Ognissanti.¹⁵

The interest in textiles was shared by the three lines of the Vespucci, and information can be gathered from guild records, private family papers, and contemporary descriptions. Of the three members that founded the enterprise, Antonio the notary does not seem to have been enrolled in either the wool or the silk guild. Guidoantonio was *immatricolato* to the silk guild and, just like the members of other major Florentine mercantile families, owned *botteghe* together with his brother Simone, a member of the wool guild.¹⁶ Simone's son, Niccolò, continued the family business and, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, he was in charge of procuring lavish garments for the Cardinal Ippolito d'Este.¹⁷

¹⁴ TROTTA 1988, 13-18. For the predominant role of the Arno in the textile industry: GUARDUCCI 2005, 76-77.

¹⁵ In his will of 1445 Giovanni di Simone Vespucci left some of the 48 *parti* he had of the *Mulina d'Ognissanti* to his sons Guidoantonio and Simone (ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, f. 227r). The money allocated to the order was meant to be used to remember the donor with celebration *pro anima sua*: 'Item amore dei et pro remedio animae suae reliquit et legavit fratribus capitulo et conventui fratrum Omnium Sanctorum de florentia unam partem ex 48 partibus tangen[tem] dicto testatorj et sup[ra] [...] mulina dogni sanctis. Cum onere que anno quolibet faciant duo anniversaria [...] pro anima sua', ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, ff. 227r-v.

¹⁶ ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicorno, 1010 (1480), ff. 41r-42v. For the presence of wool and silk *botteghe* owned and managed by influential Florentine families: DE ROOVER 1999, 6-8 and 14-23; FRANCESCHI 2006, 23-24; MUNRO 2007, 105-141.

¹⁷ CATALANO 1931, 398. A book of *ricordanze* witnesses that Simone and his son Niccolò run several *botteghe* of Florence. The volume is called 'Libro di Antonio Scarlatti che si chiama diario segreto di Niccolò Vespucci', BNCF, Cod. 14, Palch. IV Magliab.

As for the line of Amerigo the Elder, the inventory of 1479 (Appendix 2, Document 4) offers a glimpse inside the textile possessions in the house of Bartolomeo Vespucci. Here bundles of cottons (*bambagia filata*), brocades, oriental textile (*damaschino*), and female clothes coming from the Flanders (*cioppa di bigio fiandresco da donna*) were found.¹⁸ Among the other objects, there are listed silk veils, taffetà, brocades, a red drapery with four golden buttons, a bundle of textiles, and a tapestry. Girolamo and Bernardo, moreover, were matriculated in the wool guild and, although no archival proof exists, the same might be assumed for Giorgio Antonio: the coat of arms of the Wool Guild often featured in the manuscripts he possessed.¹⁹

For the third branch of the Vespucci, the *Giostra* of Luigi Pulci provides a description of Piero di Giuliano during the joust of 1469: the horse was covered by a green and gold silk drape while Piero had an embroidered *sopravesta* of Alexandria velvet.²⁰ The family's *Compagnia*, the owning of *botteghe*, the range of lavish clothes among their possessions, and the enrolment of family members in the wool and silk guilds suggest the Vespucci's interests in textile business, probably fostered by the presence of the nearby mills along the Arno and the prosperous activity of the Humiliati.

As well as commercial activities, the Vespucci established a close relationship with the Humiliati through their patronage in Ognissanti. Studies on the Humiliati have shown that the order experienced a marked decline throughout the Renaissance, which eventually led to its suppression in late sixteenth century.²¹ The

¹⁸ ASF, Corp. Sopp. 74, 101, I, ff. 42r-43v. For the meaning and use of the term *domaschino*: SPALLANZANI 2007, 60.

¹⁹ Girolamo and Bernardo are recorded as members of the Arte della Lana in the *catasto* of 1480: CARACCI 1999a, 42. For the Arte della Lana's coat of arms on Giorgio Antonio's manuscripts: MARTINI 1955, 20; GALLORI and NENCIONI 1997, 180-181.

²⁰ 'Giunse in sul campo il gentil Pier Vespucci: nel suo stendardo una fanciulla a gioco Amor beffava con sua balestrucci, e in un bel rivo fiaccole di foco ispegne, ove costui par che si crucci; e per cimiere una leggiadra chioma di questa dama havea, ch'Amor non doma. Di seta verde e fiori d'or contesta avea una coverta molto bella: el caval del cimier copria con questa e 'l suo destrier, che Buffato s'appella; velluto alexandrin per sopra vesta portava, e tutta ricamata è quella; e lui pareva Hectorre senza fallo co(n) molta gente a piede e a cavallo', PULCI 1986, 80-81.

²¹ MILLER and TAYLOR-MITCHELL 2004, 174.

period of 1470-1480 may have coincided with one of the most crucial phases for the order, who benefited from the financial contribution of the Vespucci to erect private chapels and decorate the interior of the church. Like other wealthy families of Florence the Vespucci searched for honour not only through commercial exercises (likely to generate profits), but also through pious activities such as charitable actions, and the embellishment of their parish church, which would have ensured the family prestige in the city. The studies of Dale Kent, Francis William Kent, and Richard Trexler have shown that for Florentine families ecclesiastical patronage was closely linked to charity. The intertwining of these factors fostered families's reputation, extinguished their sins and crimes, and guaranteed the salvation of their souls.²² These were in all probability the reasons that prompted several Vespucci family members to enter the lay confraternity of the Dodici Buonomini of San Martino, whose aim was to provide assistance to the 'poveri vergognosi' of Florence.²³

Why did the Vespucci choose Ognissanti? Francis William Kent discussed how Florentine ecclesiastical patrons chose to decorate and endow churches in which other distinguished families, to whom they were associated, operated.²⁴ This does not seem to have been the case for the Vespucci. Despite the heavy reconstruction works of the sixteenth century conducted under the Franciscan order, the study of Ferdinando Batazzi and Annamaria Giusti has shown that no family chapels other than the Vespucci's seem to have been in place in the fifteenth century, the only exception being that of Lorenzo Lenzi founded in 1442 and located along the transept.²⁵ This suggests that the Vespucci had control of Ognissanti during the Quattrocento: between 1376 and 1480 the Vespucci bought and decorated three chapels - one for each family line: *The Cappella del Presepio* and the *Cappella del Nome del Gesù*, placed on the right and left side of the transept respectively (Figure 34, numbers 17 and 11), and the *Cappella della Misericordia*,

²² TREXLER 1973, 64-109; KENT 1995, 171-192; KENT 2003, 254-272.

²³ CADOGAN 2000, 209. For a list of the Vespucci members who entered the Twelve Buonomini of San Martino: Chapter 2, page 90, n. 42.

²⁴ KENT 1995, 182-192.

²⁵ BATAZZI and GIUSTI 1992, 43-44.

identifiable with the second altar on the right side of the nave (Figure 34, numbers 3).

Extending their patronage throughout the sacred space of the church, by probably making use of the good relationship established with the Humiliati, the Vespucci transformed Ognissanti into the family church, electing it as their spiritual space. This must have reinforced the family's visibility and prestige over the *gonfalone* Unicornio across which it had already started to move by forging the alliances and acquiring the properties discussed in Chapter 2. Ognissanti appears an important space for the Vespucci: the hospital founded by Simone Vespucci in Borgo Ognissanti was called *Santa Maria dell'Umiltà*, probably referring to the Humiliati and the humility that fed their ideals; two places discovered by Amerigo Vespucci in South America were respectively called 'Rio S. Augustino' and 'Baia de Todos los Santos', containing references to the name of the family church and *St. Augustine*.²⁶

Ognissanti remained important throughout the lives of the Vespucci family members. According to the testaments retrieved and discussed in Chapter 1, most family members requested to be buried in Ognissanti. Their wives also found in Ognissanti a burial space as in the case of Bice Vespucci and Margherita Ciciaporci. The latter, in her will of 1612, requested to be buried in the Vespucci church together with her son Benedetto.²⁷ In other instances, Vespucci family members elected to be buried in other churches of Florence. Antonia Vespucci, daughter of Simone di Giovanni, was buried together with her husband Antonio Strozzi in Santa Maria Novella, as the presence of the families coats of arms on the tomb demonstrates (Figure 13). Giorgio Antonio, canon of Santa Maria del Fiore, elected

²⁶ POHL 1944, 112-113, 224.

²⁷ ASF, Notarile Moderno, 11155-11175 [Ser Ippolito Puccetti]). Among those family members who elected Ognissanti as their burial place: Giovanni di Simone; Guidoantonio di Giovanni; Simone di Giovanni.

to be buried in Florence's cathedral while he bequeathed money to have masses celebrated for his soul in Ognissanti.²⁸

2. The *Cappella del Presepio* and the *Cappella del Nome del Gesù*

The Vespucci conformed to the practice of appropriating of sacred spaces that started in the late medieval period, having bought the right for the *Cappella del Nome del Gesù* in 1376 (Figure 35).²⁹ The chapel belonged to the line of Simone Vespucci, the founder of the hospital in Borgo Ognissanti. The inscription of the grave placed on the floor (Sepulc[rum]. Simoni Petri de Vespuccio mercatoris ac filiorum et descenduntium et uxoris q[ui] fieri ac pingi fecit totam istam cappellam pro anima sua A. MCCCCLXXVI), at the entrance of the chapel, makes the burial space as belonging to Simone's family line, and states that the chapel had been fully decorated in 1376 (Figure 36). No information survives on the type of decoration that adorned the chapel, but because the inscription mentioned that the chapel was fully decorated it must be assumed that it was frescoed. A clarification is needed for the Latin inscription of the grave. In their publication of Ognissanti, Batazzi and Giusti transcribed the relative pronoun indicated by the letter 'q' as 'quae'. By doing so they linked the pronoun to the word 'uxoris', thus suggesting that the wife was the one in charge of getting the chapel decorated. This reading, however, proves problematic. It is, in fact, difficult to establish what the pronoun stands for: it could be 'quae' or 'qui' and it could refer to either Simone (qui) or his wife (quae). Grammatically, these are both suitable options. By linking the pronoun 'q' to the wife, Batazzi and Giusti implied that there was a women patron within the Vespucci family. Catherine King showed that most commissioning women in the Late Medieval and Renaissance period were not wives, but widows.³⁰ This is not the case when it comes to the Vespucci: the stone slab dates 1376, but Simone only died in 1400, thus suggesting that he was alive when the chapel was decorated. I therefore

²⁸ ASF, NA [Ser Paolo Grassi] 10094, ff. 331r-334v (Appendix 2, Document 1).

²⁹ NELSON 2006, 353.

³⁰ KING 1998, 76-98.

propose to transcribe the pronoun as 'qui', and refer it to Simone, the most likely patron of the *Cappella del Nome del Gesù*.

The other side of the transept, next to the sacristy, hosts the *Cappella del Presepio* belonged to Giuliano di Lapo Vespucci and his family line (Figure 37). The stone marker is placed outside of the space of the chapel, just before its entrance gate (Figure 38). The inscription is not visible anymore but a seventeenth-century *Sepoltuario* remembers that the patronage rights were acquired in 1476.³¹ In this case too, not much is known about the decoration of the chapel, and it is not possible to establish whether masses or celebrations were held here. Through the centuries both these chapels were handed down to the different families the Vespucci were related to through marriage, and this passage of properties resulted in complete neglect of the sacred spaces.³² Francesco Martinelli, Ognissanti's sexton, noted in his *Ricordi* of 1666 that by that time both the Vespucci chapels along the transept were in such bad condition that renovation works took place in that year.³³

Although there is not enough surviving information to understand what the Vespucci chapels looked like, they can still provide an insight into the Vespucci family as a whole. By building three chapels, each belonging to a different line, the Vespucci fit in what has been defined as 'the cult of remembrance', the desire to leave a long-lasting memory of oneself not only within the family but also within the city.³⁴ Family chapels would have not only served for private use but, placed in the public space of a church, would have also provided a certain visibility of the family among the citizens.³⁵ The chapels in the transept, in particular, would have signalled the importance of the Vespucci: as happened in other churches of the city, such as

³¹ ASPSFS, Sepoltuario 200bis, unnumbered folios.

³² The Cappella del Nome del Gesù was handed down to the Antinori, the Baldovinetti and the Martellini.

³³ ASPSFS, 220 ter, ff. 155r-163r.

³⁴ BUTTERFIELD 2000, 138.

³⁵ NORMAN 1995, 192-193.

Santo Spirito and San Lorenzo, chapels in the transepts were allocated to the wealthiest families.³⁶

Despite the presence of three chapels, the Vespucci seems to have shared a common sense of ownership. In her will of 1471, Bice - widow of Giuliano Vespucci – asked that at her death 20 florins be spent to provide a choir book, six bronze lamps, and an antependium for the altar of the ‘corporis Christi’.³⁷ Given that, at the time, her family chapel had not yet been erected, her will must refer to the other Vespucci altar that was about to be in place along the nave. This aspect is interesting to understand more about how the family branches related one with the other and how they operated. As the rest of the chapter will elucidate, the Vespucci pursued common goals, with the aim of establishing themselves within Florence social elite. By 1470 they had already reached a good social and economic position in the city, aligning themselves to the medium-high citizens. The Vespucci’s status is confirmed by their tax declaration and activities, but also by the typology of tombs that feature in their chapels: the flat stone marker. Placed in the wall or in the floor, and bearing a brief inscription, these markers served as sepulchres for the majority of property-holding Florentines.³⁸

3. The *Cappella della Misericordia*

The *Cappella della Misericordia* (Figure 39) is the second chapel on the right side of Ognissanti’s nave. This is the oldest chapel of the nave, and the only one that survived the construction works carried out by the Franciscans in the 1560s. As all the other altars of the nave are dated between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century, it is difficult to understand how the interior of the building looked like in the Quattrocento and what other chapels were in place, beside the Vespucci’s.³⁹ The *Cappella della Misericordia* belonged to the line of Amerigo the Elder, as

³⁶ The Frescobaldi, Corbinelli, and Capponi had their chapels in the transept of Santo Spirito: BURKE 2004, 65. For Cosimo de’ Medici chapel in the transept of San Lorenzo: ELAM 1992b, 157-180.

³⁷ CADOGAN 2000, 193. The altar mentioned is in all probability that of the *Cappella della Misericordia*.

³⁸ BUTTERFIELD 2000, 140. For a comparison with similar sepulchres in Santa Croce: CHITI 2012, 19-65; IACOPINO 2012, 374-375.

³⁹ For the history of Ognissanti’s nave and the erection of the chapels: Giusti and Batazzi 1992, 17-22.

confirmed by the stone marker (Figure 40). As Karl Schlebusch discovered, the patronage rights were acquired by Amerigo's three sons - Nastagio, Giorgio Antonio, and Bartolomeo - around 1471-1472, and the chapel was in all probability painted between then and 1476.⁴⁰ Normally cited *en passant* among Ghirlandaio's works, the chapel requires to be analysed as a work in itself. Further observation needs to be carried out on the identification of the sitters (in which scholars have often tried to recognise portraits of Vespucci family members); on the treatments of the landscape; on the structure of the scene in relation to the nearly disappeared saints that flank it; and on the problematic aspects that emerge not only when re-reading the historiographical accounts of the chapel, but also in light of the two restoration campaigns that have partly altered the perception of the fresco. Ghirlandaio's frescoes for the *Cappella della Misericordia* comprise a *Madonna della Misericordia* in the lunette (Figure 41) and a *Deposition* in the lower part, flanked by two niches with angels or saints now partly faded away (Figure 42). When the chapel passed into the hands of Alessandro Marzi Medici, son of Elisabetta Vespucci, the frescoes were covered behind the painting attributed to Matteo Rosselli representing *St. Elisabeth of Portugal*.⁴¹ In 1898, the Franciscan Padre Roberto Razzoli, while reading the chronicles of Ognissanti, realised that behind Rosselli's canvas there must have been the Vespucci frescoes which, according to Vasari, included the portrait of Amerigo the explorer.⁴² Once revealed in 1898, the chapel and its frescoes attracted the attention of many scholars who focused on their dating and the identification of the sitters, dedicating particular attention to the portrait of the navigator, identified in the head of the young boy kneeling next

⁴⁰ SCHLEBUSCH 2009, 364-374.

⁴¹ This must have happened in the second half of the sixteenth century. Alessandro Marzi Medici was the son of Elisabetta Vespucci (from which, presumably, the choice of displaying a canvas representing St. Elisabeth of Portugal) and Vincenzo Marzi Medici. Elisabetta's sister, Fioretta, was married to Michele Marzi Medici, brother of Vincenzo. The *scritta di parentado* that joined the sisters to the Marzi Medici is dated 15 January 1532 and is kept in the Marzi Medici Archive: ASF, Marzi Medici, filza 8, Registro 21, unnumbered folios. The family archive also preserves inventories that list the couples' possessions in 1534: ASF, Marzi Medici, 8, Registro 1 'Inventari Diversi', unnumbered folios.

⁴² RAZZOLI 1898b, 6-7. Vasari mentioned the presence of Amerigo the explorer among the sitters of the lunette: VASARI 1967, vol. 3, 154; CONTI 2010b, 280. For the discovery of Ghirlandaio's fresco in 1898: FRANCESCHINI 1898, 10; GIUSTI 1990, 112.

to the Virgin in the lunette.⁴³ The twelve kneeling figures were therefore identified as members of the family of Amerigo the explorer, a hypothesis recently suggested again by Schlebusch.⁴⁴

Schlebusch identified the male and female figures closest to the Virgin as Amerigo the Elder and his wife Nanna; Nastagio the notary as the man in red on the far left; Giorgio Antonio as the man dressed in black next to Nastagio; Bartolomeo as the man dressed in white; and Amerigo the explorer as the young boy next to the Virgin. On the female side, Schlebusch saw Nastagio's wife Monna Lisa as the lady on the far right dressed in black, Maria wife of Bartolomeo in the young lady, and Piera, Verdiana and Fioretta as the three other women, Piera being the nun who entered the convent of San Martino al Mugnone. The hypothesis of the young lady being Simonetta Vespucci, which was advanced by scholars who saw striking similarities between the fresco of the lunette and sculpted busts considered portraits of Simonetta, was, instead, ignored by Schlebusch.⁴⁵

Schlebusch exclusively relied on archival material, failing to take into consideration the visual information provided by the fresco. His identification, in fact, poses problematic questions when approached from an art historical perspective, in particular when considering the sitters's clothing. The studies of Carole Collier Frick have evaluated the role of clothing in the Renaissance, focussing on how fashion was employed as a visual symbol of an individual's importance.⁴⁶ When looking at the artistic representations of fifteenth-century Florence citizens, as they appear in frescoed chapels, altarpieces, and other paintings, conclusions regarding the identity and social status of the sitters can be established through the analysis of their clothes. This applies also to the characters of the Vespucci chapel's lunette. On the female side, the nun is dressed as a Franciscan, while the lady on the far right is a widow. Dressed in black, she is depicted bearing the 'widow mark',

⁴³ DE TONI 1898, 6; FRANCESCHINI 1898, 3-12; GORI 1898, 4; RAVAGLI 1898, 5; BROCKHAUS 1902, 85-134; CALAMANDREI 1935, 8; BARFUCCI and BECHERUCCI 1964, 122.

⁴⁴ SCHLEBUSCH 2009, 364-374.

⁴⁵ BALDINI 2004a, 70; LAZZI 2007, 22; LUCHS 2012, 81.

⁴⁶ For a contribution on the attitude of Florentines towards the dress and the social role of clothes: FRICK 2002, 77-94.

a horizontal black stripe on her linen veil. A visual link can be established with the widow represented by Ghirlandaio in the Chapel of St. Fina in San Gimignano (Figure 43).⁴⁷ On the male side, the young man dressed in white wears the Camaldolese habit. This is confirmed by a sixteenth-century portrait representing the Camaldolese painter Lorenzo Monaco wearing the same white cloak and hat (Figure 44).⁴⁸ The black and red robes identify the three male sitters as wealthy men: while red was used for the dress of politically active citizens, black was often employed by lawyers or merchants to demonstrate male urban dignity.⁴⁹ In light of these considerations, Schlebusch's identifications need to be revised. The identification of Monna Lisa as the lady on the far right is not sustainable. According to the *catasto* in fact, Monna Lisa was not a widow in the 1470s as her husband, Ser Nastagio, lived until the 1480s.⁵⁰ The identification of the young monk as Bartolomeo, and the Franciscan nun as Piera, need to be investigated further as the *catasto* fails to provide any information on either. Similarly, the *bocche* mentioned in Nastagio's tax declaration do not coincide with the number of figures depicted by Ghirlandaio, leaving identification issues unsolved.

Given the Vespucci family's tendency to collaborate closely with one another, is it possible that the lunette fresco features members belonging to different branches of the family? When looking at the tax declarations of other lines between 1470-80, two widows and a Franciscan nun can be identified in the line of Simone Vespucci, founder of the hospital: Antonia, mother of Guidoantonio (74 years old in 1480); Angiola, widow of Piero Vespucci (50 years old in 1480), and the

⁴⁷ FRICK 2002, 88-90, 175.

⁴⁸ ROCCA 2000, 142-145; TARTUFERI 2006, 98.

⁴⁹ Examples of lawyers dressed in black appear in the lunettes of San Martino dei Buonomini (Florence) frescoed by Ghirlandaio around 1478-1479 and in the panel representing the Adoration of the Magi of the Polittico di Pisa by Masaccio (c. 1426. Tempera on panel. 21 x 59,6 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin). Tommaso Portinari, the Medici banker and merchant, is portrayed in black by Hans Memling (c. 1470. Oil on wood. 44,1 x 33,7 cm. Metropolitan Museum, New York). Other examples of men dressed in black can be found in the several portraits of Florentine personalities – often anonymous – created throughout the 1470s and 1480s.

⁵⁰ In both the *portate* of 1470 and 1480 Ser Nastagio declares to live with his wife Monna Lisa and his sons.

nun Battista, daughter of Bernardo.⁵¹ If the fresco was carried out between 1470 and 1477 Battista would have been in her twenties, which corresponds well with the young-looking face depicted by Ghirlandaio. Furthermore it is interesting to note that Giovanni Vespucci, uncle of the nun, established links of patronage with the Franciscans by endowing money to the convent of San Onofrio. These hypotheses can only remain speculative, as the identity of the remaining sitters cannot be advanced on the sole basis of the *catasto*. The outfits of the onlookers do not provide any further information, simply portraying family members as wealthy Florentine citizens.⁵² The archbishop is identifiable with Antonino Pierozzi, founder of the lay confraternity of the Dodici Buonomini in 1442, and then prior of San Marco and archbishop of Florence. His presence might refer to the fact that since 1425 members of Simone and Amerigo the Elder's lines had been members of the Dodici Buonomini di San Martino. Including Antonino in the lunette could have been a way to commemorate this dead friend and important Florentine figure.⁵³

The fresco in the lunette would have had a great impact both on the attendants of the church and on family members. On the one hand it would have presented the Vespucci as a close, pious, and powerful family. On the other, it would have reminded family members of the right behavior to adopt: Vespucci women, in particular, would have seen in the fresco the correct rules of conduct both in the religious and familiar sphere. The gendered image of the lunette – men on one side, women on the other – would have called to mind the husband's authority. The Virgin Mary would have been seen as an example for women and young girls. In the *Libro di Buoni Costumi*, Paolo da Certaldo suggested that both virginal girls and women must follow the example of Mary and learn from her so

⁵¹ ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicorno, 1010 (1480), 41r-42r and 417r.

⁵² It is possible that the young girl got married around the time Ghirlandaio frescoed the lunette. Ladies about to marry or who just got married in fact used to tie their hair up on the side (as in Ghirlandaio's lunette) or behind their head often including a thin veil or jewels: HERALD 1981, Ch. 7.

⁵³ The way the archbishop is dressed bears striking similarities with the *reliquia* of Antonino, today in the church of San Marco. On the Antonino's life, piety and commitment to helping poor citizens: CORNELISON 2012, 11-46. On the presence of contemporary portraits in religious frescoes: MARCHAND 1998, 107-127.

they would be acceptable to God, society and their husbands.⁵⁴ By looking at the Madonna of Mercy and the suffering Mary in the *Deposition*, female members of the Vespucci family had images that emphasized the importance of pray and devotion, family union, and motherhood.

The controversial identification of the sitters does not exclusively concern the lunette, but the *Deposition* too. Previous scholars have identified the two figures on the far left with members of the Vespucci family: Amerigo the explorer is the young light-haired male to the far left, and his uncle Giorgio Antonio the older man next to him. One recent hypothesis has also suggested that the latter might be Amerigo's father, Nastagio, as the figure, holding what looks like the martyr's palm, was identified as St. Anastasius of Persia by Schlebusch in 2009.⁵⁵ Although these hypotheses should not be discarded altogether, a deeper analysis is needed. The identification of the older man with Giorgio Antonio resulted from the association of his black outfit with the habit of the Dominican order, which he joined towards the end of his life. It should be noted, however, that Giorgio Antonio's presence in San Marco is only documented from 1497 onwards and, at the time the fresco was executed, he had not yet entered the convent. Moreover Ghirlandaio's bystander does not feature the characteristics Dominican habit, normally represented as a white tunic with a black *cuculla*, or cowl, on top of it.⁵⁶ Beyond clothing matters, the identity of the sitter is also questioned by his inclusion in the advance stage of the decoration works. The fresco's *sinopia* (Figure 45), mounted on canvas and displayed in the refectory of Ognissanti, shows that the onlooker was not part of the former composition, but added later on, probably at the request of the patron.⁵⁷ Indeed, the characterised physiognomy of the depiction seems to indicate that this was a portrait, and the identification of the sitter with a member of the

⁵⁴ TINAGLI 1997, 158-161.

⁵⁵ SCHLEBUSCH 2009, 364-374.

⁵⁶ ROCCA 2000, 303-310. Examples across Florence can be seen in the cells of the convent of San Marco painted by Beato Angelico (1440s); in the *Cenacolo* of San Marco by Giovanni Antonio Sogliani (1536); and in the cloister of Santa Maria Novella (1580s).

⁵⁷ CADOGAN 2000, 104-105, 122-123, 194.

Vespucci family would therefore be the most appropriate explanation. If the man represented is Giorgio Antonio why was not he originally included?

It is hard to prove whether the man portrayed is Giorgio Antonio as a lack of biographical studies have left this figure a somewhat ill-defined personality. As discussed in Chapter 1, his activity between 1460-1470 is hard to pin down, while a clearer chronology can be outlined for the following years: as a teacher in 1476; as canon and provost of Santa Maria del Fiore in 1482 and 1483; and as Dominican friar from 1497-1514, the year of his death. From previous studies the connection of Giorgio Antonio with the convents of San Domenico in Fiesole and the Badia of Settimo also emerged, but information and chronological references are blurred.⁵⁸ Although Giorgio Antonio entered San Marco in 1497, in the *catasto* of 1480 he claimed to be in *habito et tonsure*, but it still has to be determined where. The black habit worn by Ghirlandaio's bystander in the *Deposition* does seem to be a religious one but it is difficult to understand to which religious group it can be associated.⁵⁹ Knowing if Giorgio Antonio joined the order at some point in 1470s might help in dating the fresco: the later inclusion of the onlooker in the depiction could have followed an important occasion. However, the only remarkable event so far recognised in the period under consideration is not a religious one: in 1476 Lorenzo il Magnifico appointed Giorgio Antonio as Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici's private tutor. This event, marking the official inclusion of a Vespucci member into the Medici household, might have been commemorated with the inclusion of Giorgio Antonio in the fresco.⁶⁰ There are no iconographical elements to determine whether the figure represented was portrayed as a *magister*. The object in his hand, in fact, cannot be considered a writing tool. Renaissance pens, made of goose quills,

⁵⁸ Giorgio Antonio was introduced to the Badia di Settimo by the bibliophile Filippo di Ser Ugolino Peruzzi. Here he became friend with the Cistercian monk Giovanni. Two letters sent by Giorgio Antonio to Giovanni survive in the BNCF. They have been found and transcribed by Arciniegas: LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 'Giorgio Antonio Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios.

⁵⁹ No connection can be established between the habit worn by Ghirlandaio's bystander and those of Florence's principal religious orders as represented in the fifteenth century. For visual references: Rocca 2000, 149-150, 165-173, 204-207.

⁶⁰ This would confirm the dating Schlebusch proposed for the fresco, 1476-1477: Schlebusch 2009, 364-374.

appeared smaller and thinner, like the one represented by Ghirlandaio in the Ognissanti *St. Jerome* (Figure 71). Longer, thicker, and green, the object is likely to be a martyr's palm.⁶¹ If the fresco could be dated to 1476, this year seems to have been a particularly significant one for the Vespucci family: Giorgio Antonio entered the Medici household; the *Compagnia del Mulino* was formed; and the rights for the *Cappella della Misericordia* acquired.

Problems of identification are also raised by the presence of a very similar looking portrait in the *basilica* of San Miniato al Monte. Here, in the spandrels of the arch that frames the entrance to the chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal, are depicted two prophets attributed to Alesso Baldovinetti, the artist who collaborated in the execution of the chapel in conjunction with the Pollaiuolo brothers in 1467.⁶² In her book on Baldovinetti, Ruth Kennedy Wedgwood pointed out that one of the prophets, Elijah, bears striking resemblance to the by-stander of the *Deposition* (Figure 46 a and b). The thin lips, dark eyes and prominent wrinkles suggest a contemporary portrait, and the blue cloak, habit of the Monteolivetan order of San Miniato, encouraged scholars to question whether he was a monk in the church.⁶³

The characterised physiognomy of the fresco seems to confirm this was a portrait and, in all probability, that it represents the same man identified as Elijah in the spandrel of San Miniato.⁶⁴ A Vespucci connection with the images could only be advanced if links between Giorgio Antonio and San Miniato are established. Certainly, in the *Deposition*, this intriguing figure is not the only portrait. Another two can be pointed out as so: the young light-haired man next to him, and the bearded old man placed on the far right of the composition. The three of them not only have individualised features, but are also the only ones represented

⁶¹ For the description and visual evidence of writing tools in Renaissance: THORNTON 1997, part 6. I have briefly discussed the representation of the martyr's palm in Ghirlandaio's *Deposition*: MARIANI 2012, 219-222.

⁶² WRIGHT 2005, 192-208.

⁶³ KENNEDY WEDGWOOD 1938, 159; HARTT 1964, 114-115.

⁶⁴ The two prophets in the spandrels have been neglected in previous literature and mention of them does not appear even in the most recent contribution: APFELSTADT 2000, 183-223; WRIGHT 2005, 192-208.

emotionless while the others are crying above Christ's dead body.⁶⁵ As it was common practice in Renaissance Florence to include portraits of contemporary local citizens as witnesses of the biblical scenes, it is no surprise to find three possible portraits among the by-standers of the *Deposition*.⁶⁶ Including contemporary portraits within religious scenes was a way to commemorate and celebrate the patrons who commissioned the work, as well as the friends and acquaintances in his social network.⁶⁷

4. Attempting a reconstruction of style, models and influences

Ronald Kecks defined the *Cappella della Misericordia* as being unusual, joining together two such different themes as the Madonna of Humility and the *Deposition*.⁶⁸ The decision to combine these two images is difficult to explain, but the frescoes seem to assume a clearer meaning when considered in relation to the space of Ognissanti. Although the decoration of the church in the fifteenth century remains largely obscure, Irene Hueck's study has permitted to deepen our comprehension of the decoration of the *tramezzo*, as I will further discuss in the second part of this chapter.⁶⁹ At the time the Vespucci chapel was frescoed (1473-1476), the *tramezzo* displayed Giotto's Crucifix, his *Madonna and Child*, and the *Dormitio Virginis* (Figure 70). Both the *tramezzo* and the Vespucci chapel focus their attention on two figures: Christ and the Virgin. Although it is difficult to determine whether a specific iconological programme was in place, it is nonetheless possible to speculate on the possible meaning behind the 'visual dialogue' established by the images of the *tramezzo* and those of the chapel. Presenting scenes of life and death, the thematic link might have lain in the celebration of faith and salvation. The

⁶⁵ BARASH 1991, 99.

⁶⁶ As noted by Boorsok and Offerhaus example of this practice can be traced back to Giotto and Nardo di Cione in Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella. POPE-HENNESSY 1966, 3-63; BOORSOK AND OFFERHAUS 1981, 36; FLETCHER 2008, 71-73.

⁶⁷ For a study of Ghirlandaio's use of this practice and how it fits Florence's needs and culture see RUBIN 1996, 97-108 and MARCHAND 1998, 107-127. For the idea of portraits and commemoration in church chapels: POPE-HENNESSY 1966, 3-64; WRIGHT 2000, 88; FLETCHER 2008, 71-107. For a comparison between Florence and Padua of the use of patrons-friends portraits within the context of a funerary private chapel: NORMAN 1995, 192.

⁶⁸ KECKS 1995, 100.

⁶⁹ HUECK 1992, 37-50.

crucifixion and *Deposition*, serving as a reminder of Christ's sacrifice for humanity, would have moved the believer's soul, fostering devotion and prayer. Images of the Virgin would have celebrated the role of Mary as mother of Christ (*Madonna and Child*) and as 'mother of humanity': ascended to Heaven after her death (*Dormitio*), she intercedes with God to distribute grace and hope to mankind who prays to her (*Madonna of Mercy*) to obtain salvation and eternal life.

Focussing on the layout of the lunette, Kecks noted that earlier representations of the Madonna della Misericordia presented the Virgin Mary as a 'mater omnium' under whose mantle were gathered figures to be variously identified as members of the clergy or with the poor of the city. Instead, the Ognissanti chapel displays precise figures that Kecks believed to be members of the Vespucci family. According to Kecks, a parallel could be established with the *Misericordia Polyptych*, painted by Piero della Francesca between 1440-1460 for the church of the Compagnia di Santa Maria della Misericordia, in the town of Sansepolcro near Arezzo. The central panel features the Virgin around whose mantle are represented various figures divided by gender: men are on the left, and women are on the right (Figure 47). As Diane Cole Ahl discussed, the distinctive appearances of some of these characters, together with their lavish dresses and realistic hairstyles, suggest that they were portraits of contemporaries, to be identified as members of the Pichi family who commissioned the altarpiece.⁷⁰ Discussing the history of the Madonna della Misericordia and its popularity in the Trecento, Ahl understands Piero's panel within the tradition of the late medieval period. At the same time the author also highlights Piero's innovations, in particular the humanity conveyed by his Madonna: directing her gaze towards the devotees at her feet, Piero creates an intimate bond between them.⁷¹ Similar considerations can be applied to the Vespucci lunette, but it is also difficult to evaluate how the Vespucci fresco fits into Florence's visual tradition. A fourteenth century Madonna della Misericordia was frescoed in the Bigallo, but what about the representation of

⁷⁰ AHL 2002, 22.

⁷¹ AHL 2002, 25-28.

other familial groups gathered under the Virgin's mantle?⁷² This iconographical model has not been explored by scholars and it awaits further research. A panel realised by an anonymous fifteenth-century Florentine artist for an unknown family, however, seems to suggest that this theme enjoyed some popularity (Figure 48).

Ghirlandaio's *Deposition* also appears to be a peculiar composition. The iconography of the fresco, with the semicircular disposition of the bystanders grouped together around Christ, does not seem to find parallels in the Florentine artistic production of the time, the closest examples being Giotto's *Deposition* in the Upper Church of the basilica of Assisi and in the Scrovegni chapel in Padua (Figure 49). Florentine representations of the *Deposition* around the 1470s had a different layout, presenting a frontal depiction of Christ whose arms are held on both sides by two angels, as the fresco in the refectory of the Florentine convent of Santa Apollonia, painted by Andrea del Castagno in the 1440s, shows (Figure 50).⁷³

The treatment of Ghirlandaio's *Deposition* alerts us to the possibility of northern sources, and connections between the artist's production and Flemish art have often been stressed. Scholarly attention has focused primarily on Ghirlandaio's ability at portraiture, the historical and narrative features of his paintings, the treatment of the landscape, and the care in representing emotions.⁷⁴ All these aspects qualified Ghirlandaio as the artist who, in the second half of the fifteenth century, achieved the most remarkable synthesis of Italian and Netherlandish elements. As Paula Nuttall discussed, a number of fifteenth-century Florentine painters incorporated Netherlandish pictorial forms and motifs in their paintings.⁷⁵ These characteristics are recognisable in Ghirlandaio's early work such as the Vespucci chapel, the *Deposition* being identified as containing elements derived from northern examples: the position of the characters, the treatment of the

⁷² The *Madonna della Misericordia* was painted by the workshop of Bernardo Daddi around 1342. It is displayed in the Museo del Bigallo in Florence.

⁷³ For similar representations in Venice, especially in the production of Giovanni Bellini: BELTING 1996, 20-28. For the development of this theme in western art: ZUFFETTI 2014, 1-128.

⁷⁴ MESNIL 1911, 61-76; AMES-LEWIS 1989, 111-122; AMES-LEWIS 1996, 81-88; KECKS 1996, 43-60; NUTTALL 1996, 16-22; RUBIN 1996, 97-108; CADOGAN 2000, 37 and 193; TAKUMI 2005, 37-44.

⁷⁵ NUTTALL 2004, 133-159.

landscape, and the suffering conveyed by the bystanders through tears have been linked to works such as Rogier van der Weyden's *Entombment* (Figure 51) and Dierec Bouts's *Deposition* (Figure 52).⁷⁶ According to Eto Takumi, influences might be also found in the graphic production of Dierec Bouts, Martin Schongauer, or Rogier van der Weyden, as a drawing of the latter seems to suggest (Figure 53).⁷⁷

In Florence the only example that appears to be close to Ghirlandaio's *Deposition* is Verrocchio's funerary monument for Francesca Pitti Tornabuoni, dated 1477 and today at the Bargello (Figure 54). Although the Vespucci chapel was in all probability painted before 1477, it is still interesting to note the connections that emerge between Ghirlandaio's work and those of Verrocchio and his entourage, strongly influenced by northern artistic production.⁷⁸ It should be noted that by the 1470s other artists in Florence were also responsive to northern art. As Alison Wright discussed, the Pollaiuolo brothers and Alesso Baldovinetti employed a panoramic landscape in their paintings, where foreground figures appeared elevated above the panorama just like in precedent northern paintings.⁷⁹

I would add that other elements in the fresco indicate that northern European paintings might have served as sources of inspiration. Ghirlandaio painted only half of the cross, chopping off its top. The result is a spacious scene that develops horizontally. Although a horizontal setting was adopted in fourteenth-century Italian representations of the *Deposition*, such as those of Taddeo Gaddi and Ambrogio Lorenzetti, depictions of half crosses do not seem to have been common. Examples, however, can be seen in Adriaan Reins's *Lamentation* (Figure 55), and a *Deposition* after Rogier that, although probably painted at the beginning of the sixteenth century, referred to a fifteenth-century lost example of the master

⁷⁶ ROHLMANN 1992, 388-396; AMES-LEWIS 1996, 82; CADOGAN 2000, 192-194; NUTTALL 2004, 146; VERATELLI 2006, 5-34.

⁷⁷ TAKUMI 2005, 37-44. The contribution of Eto Takumi is the only contribution that entirely focuses on the Vespucci chapel. Despite the German title, Takumi's article is in Japanese. I am grateful to Yoko Kishida for the translation.

⁷⁸ For the influence northern art played on Verrocchio and his workshop: LANE 1999, 243-50.

⁷⁹ WRIGHT 2005, 206-207.

(Figure 56).⁸⁰ Although it would need to be established whether these examples were known in Italy by the time Ghirlandaio painted the Vespucci chapel, the influence of northern examples cannot be excluded. The small figures in the background of the *Deposition* also seem to point towards this direction. Particularly evident is the group of soldiers on horseback on the left (Figure 57) and the single figure dressed in red painted behind the halo of one of the bystanders (Figure 58). Italian painters and patrons were struck by the suggestive spatial construction of northern paintings where even the smallest detail was well defined and legible, perfectly interacting with the larger parts.⁸¹

Attention should furthermore be directed to the condition of the *Deposition* prior to the restoration work of the 1960s. When the *Deposition* was uncovered in 1898 criticisms were made about the condition of the fresco, considered badly damaged by the unrefined seventeenth-century painted additions which were later removed by the restoration campaigns (Figures 59-60).⁸² Although the seventeenth-century additions have never been considered, a closer analysis of these misconceived elements can reveal more about the original fresco. Painted additions were carried out once the chapel was handed down to Alessandro Marzi Medici who, according to historiography, decided to have the decoration moved and adjusted. It is not clear which *pittura* the sources refer to, why Marzi Medici decided to have them repainted, and how they were moved.⁸³ By searching the documentation produced during the restoration campaign, no information could be

⁸⁰ RAGGHIANI 1990, 25-38.

⁸¹ Examples of background characters variously walking, standing, or riding in the background can be found in numerous fifteenth-century Flemish religious paintings such as Crucifixions and Depositions normally located within open landscapes: SELLINK 2002, 214.

⁸² LOGAN 1898, 196-200; SUPINO 1898, 58; RAGGHIANI 1935, 173.

⁸³ This information brought scholars to wonder whether the lunette or the *Deposition* might have been moved from a different location within the church. According to the authors, in fact, this might explain the particular and unusual way the *Deposition* and the lunette are assembled together: FRANCESCHINI 1898, 10; LOGAN 1898, 196-200; SUPINO 1898, 58; RAGGHIANI 1935, 173. According to the restorers, however, the frescoes were found on the same wall. I am grateful to Jean Cadogan for this information. Brief mentions of the restoration works can be found in TINTORI 1999, 24-26; CENTAURO 2001, 164-165, 185.

found on the cleaning procedures, nor on the *strappo*.⁸⁴ I believe it should be questioned why the additions were made and whether they were trying to recreate a version of the fresco closer to the original. When comparing the photographs taken before and after the restoration it appears clear what areas of the picture the re-depictions focused on: the photographs dated before the cleaning and *strappo* show that flower vases were placed above the niches that flank the *Deposition*; that details were also added on the rocks on both sides of the composition; that the clouds in the sky and the horizon line were better defined; and that the architecture in the background were all characterised by spires and pointed roofs. With the exception of the flower vases, clearly in line with the seventeenth-century taste, as similar depictions can be found in Tuscan villas of the time, all the other elements suggest Ghirlandaio's fresco was influenced by northern European models.⁸⁵

I believe that the seventeenth-century additions should not be dismissed but, instead, considered as related to the original picture. They seem to mark even further the close relationship between the *Deposition* and Flemish examples, but also prove that Ghirlandaio was aligned to the artistic production of those Florentine painters who, across the 1470s, showed adherence to the northern style. The birds on the right side, together with the treatment of the rocks and the detailed grass leaves near Christ's body, feature also in other works of the artist, such as the *Meeting of Christ and John the Baptist* in Berlin (Figure 61), and in works of other Florentine artists such as Verrocchio's *Baptism of Christ* (Figure 62) or Pietro Perugino's *Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 63).⁸⁶ The presence of a pointed roof recalls typical northern architecture such as that represented in the background of Hans Memling's *Crucifixion* (Figure 64). Among the seventeenth-century additions, the treatment of the clouds and the sky also reveals a northern

⁸⁴ The documentation found at the Ufficio Restauri of the Polo Museale Fiorentino and at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure was merely photographic and no technical information was provided.

⁸⁵ Indications of seventeenth-century vases depicted in Tuscan villas were given in RAGGHIANI 1935, 173.

⁸⁶ For the dependence of Perugino's *Adoration of the Magi* on Verrocchio and Flemish painting: GARIBALDI 1999, 8, 21, 99. For the arts of 1470s with a specific focus on Verrocchio's *bottega*: RUBIN AND WRIGHT 1999, 10-76 and 148-189.

influence. Puffy clouds are typical of fifteenth-century painting and they were variously used by artists in the Quattrocento.⁸⁷ I suggest that the well-defined line in sky was meant to mark the separation between the sea and the sky. In many paintings of this time it is common to find the presence of the sea or canals integrated in the landscape, again a reflection of a northern taste. Because of the links that can be established between the painted additions and fifteenth-century models it should be questioned why scholars chose to dismiss the former. Did the repainted parts aim to integrate the loss of original paint? It should also be considered why some of the reintegrated parts imitated a fifteenth-century style while others – the vases – clearly did not.

It is likely that the *Deposition* also presented a three dimensional frame. The extant photographic material that attests to the condition of the fresco before its detachment and restoration in 1967, shows small but visible holes that correspond to the plain lines that frame the *Deposition* and niches. Seemingly caused by the action of an invasive material such as glue, the holes suggest that a frame might have been removed, leaving the wall in a damaged condition.⁸⁸ Beyond visual evidence, archival material also seems to suggest this. According to the documents recently found by Schlebusch regarding the first phases of the chapel's construction, the Vespucci chapel had to be erected on the example of the *cappella artis mercatoris* in San Pier Scheraggio and had to include a *Pietà*.⁸⁹ The document

⁸⁷ Outside Florence examples can be found in the Crucifixions of Giovanni Bellini, recognised deriving from northern examples. Flemish art was present in Venice since the first half of the fifteenth century, displayed both in private and public spaces: AIKEMA 1999, 83-91; AIKEMA 2003, 38-59.

⁸⁸ I wish to express my gratitude to Francesca Cappuccini and Simone Vettori from the Opificio delle Pietre Dure for their helpful suggestions.

⁸⁹ 'Ser Nastagio, Bartolomeo e Giorgioantonio, figli di ser Amerigho Vespucci. Memoria che a dì 25 di novembre 1473 e predesti cirenderno libero et expedito quello luogho in chiesa ove è l'altare della Misericordia, el quale prima era stata loro concesso dal nostro Capitolo, et di questa renuntia ne fu roghato ser Girolamo Mei, et in quel medesimo dì gli concedette el Capitolo que. luogho in chiesa ove è Sancto Lorenzo fra le dua finestre a entrata in chiesa a mano ritte, che in quello potessino fare una cappella in quello modo che è quella che è in Sancto Piero Scheraggio dell'Arte de' Merchatanti, e con quella dote e con pacti medesimi che si contenevono nel primo contracto quando le concedemo l'altro luogho dalloro rinuntiato, e con questo tempo anchora che per tutto gennaio proximo la debbino haver finite e rechate a compimento. Et così promessono. Rogato ser Girolamo Mei'. SCHLEBUSCH 2009, 372. The document, written by Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, records some extracts of now lost registers, which may have belonged to the church of Ognissanti: ASF, Corp. rel. sopp. 74 [S. Domenico di Fiesole], 101, fasc. I, f. 5r.

refers to the chapel that belonged to the Arte de' Mercatanti - or Arte di Calimala. Not much is known about this chapel, as the church has been destroyed.⁹⁰ Once located next to Palazzo Vecchio, part of it was included in the Uffizi building constructed by Vasari and part was later destroyed, saving a few columns still visible today along via della Ninna (Figure 65).⁹¹

No exhaustive studies of San Pier Scheraggio and its interior exist, attention only being given to the origins of the building, the crypt, its medieval inscriptions, and its inclusion in Vasari's plans for the Uffizi.⁹² It is only possible to get a vague idea of what the church looked like and how it was internally structured when observing Ghirlandaio's *Confirmation of the Rule* in the Sassetti Chapel, where the church is visible on the right side of the town hall (Figure 66), and when considering the descriptions of the Sepoltuario Rosselli.⁹³ According to this *fonte*, the Mercatanti chapel once belonged to the Duranti family and it consisted of stone walls and altar, above which a painted panel was placed.⁹⁴ The Duranti chapel was the second one coming from the entrance, but it is not clear whether the chapel was located on the right or left side of the nave.⁹⁵ The document does not mention any fresco decoration and, in fact, the initial decision of the Vespucci brothers was to have a *tabula Misericordie* to adorn their chapel.⁹⁶ It seems that a *tabula* was actually commissioned and put into place. One of the *Sepoltuari* of Ognissanti (Figure 67),

⁹⁰ No information related to the chapel could be found in the several publications related to the guild. The one that mentions the right acquired by the guild for a chapel only refers to the church of San Giovanni, FILIPPI 1889, 185.

⁹¹ NEGRI 1978, 240-241.

⁹² LOSACCO 1921, 5-11; SANPAOLESI 1933, 3-52; SAALMAN 1962, 179-187; BEMPORAD 1968, 3-10; NEGRI 1978, 240; CASTELNUOVO TEDESCO 1985, 61-71; CESATI 2002, 158.

⁹³ BOROOK and OFFERHAUS 1981, 52-53; CESATI 2003, 142-143; ASF, Sepoltuario Rosselli, 628. I thank Francesca Funis for having pointed my attention towards the description given in the Sepoltuario Rosselli. A complete work on the history of San Pier Scheraggio is being prepared by Francesca Funis on behalf of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici of Florence.

⁹⁴ ASF, MS 628. No mention is given of the panel in the Sepoltuario but reference to an *antica tavola gotica* has been found in a journal article in the Ognissanti archive. The article, dated 1938, is pinned to the first page of the archival volume and, severely damaged, it misses the name of the author and the journal it was taken from. See: ASPSFS, 224.

⁹⁵ ASF, MS 624, f. 575; ASF, MS 628. No mention is given of the panel in the Sepoltuario but reference to an *antica tavola gotica* has been found in a journal article in the Ognissanti archive. The article, dated 1938, is pinned to the first page of the archival volume and, severely damaged, it misses the name of the author and the journal it was taken from. See: ASPSFS, 224.

⁹⁶ SCHLEBUSCH 2009, 371.

dated 1656, records that the chapel hosted a 'tavola della Pietà' that was then replaced by Rosselli's *St. Elisabeth of Portugal*.⁹⁷

All the sources seem to be pointing in the same direction, suggesting that a *tabula* was commissioned and placed in the Vespucci chapel. The word *tabula* must allude to the structure comprising of the *Deposition*, the two side niches and the three dimensional frame that surrounded them.⁹⁸ As both the frescoes are badly damaged and only small pieces survive, it is not possible to establish who they represent. In all probability, however, the figure in the left niche is the archangel Raphael as the scene depicted right below him in the rectangular space seems to be *Tobias and the Angel*.⁹⁹ Although structures that mix fresco painting and frames cannot be found in other Renaissance Florentine chapels, analogous examples exist in Roman churches such as Santa Maria del Popolo and Santa Maria sopra Minerva.¹⁰⁰ In the latter, the Carafa chapel (Figure 68), painted by Filippino Lippi in the last decade of the fifteenth century, provides a significant term of comparison.¹⁰¹ On the altar wall, beneath the monumental arch Filippino painted the Assumption and right below it the Annunciation that, set off by its carved marble frame, constitutes the central image of the chapel. As pointed out by Nelson and Zambrano the viewer does not immediately realise that the Annunciation - despite its frame - is not a panel but a fresco, painted on the same wall as the Assumption.¹⁰² No mention is however given of this peculiar decorative choice and no parallels are established with other artistic endeavors.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ ASPSFS, Sepoltuario 220bis.

⁹⁸ The word *tabula* probably alludes to a wooden frame. For other examples in which the word *tabula* is used as a reference to a panel painting: BURKE 2004, 77-78, 238 n. 71; NORMAN 2007, 176.

⁹⁹ This hypothesis firstly advanced in RAGGHIANI 1935, 177.

¹⁰⁰ For an overview of Florence's Renaissance chapels and their decoration: BELLINI 1998, 11-127.

¹⁰¹ The chapel decoration was commissioned to Filippino in 1488 and was substantially completed by 1493: GEIGER 1986, 45-54; ZAMBRANO and NELSON 2004, 513-555; NELSON 2011, 41-49.

¹⁰² ZAMBRANO and NELSON 2004, 516.

¹⁰³ Also Gail Geiger, discussing the Carafa chapel and its painted cycle, found the presence of the marble frame 'ambiguous', referring to the unusual presence of a marble frame over a fresco decoration, GEIGER 1986, 162. The most recent contribution on the Carafa chapel only focuses on Filippino's thematic programme: MAININI 2012, 9-26.

Further evidence is offered by the *Incoronata* of Lodi: in 1494 a miraculous fresco representing the Virgin - originally located on the façade of a nearby house - was detached, inserted in a wooden frame, and placed on the main altar of the church.¹⁰⁴ The scarce presence of examples where fresco and three-dimensional frames were combined does not necessarily mean that similar structures were not common in Italy. When commissioning for their chapels, patrons not only had precise ideas of what they wanted, but they also aimed to display paintings or altarpieces similar to those works they had seen elsewhere. This might have been true for the Vespucci but the models the family was inspired by still remain unknown.

5. Artistic taste and identity

When dealing with Ghirlandaio's frescoes in the Vespucci chapel, references to Netherlandish paintings are often established in relation to the general layout of the composition, the attention to details, and the artist's ability in capturing emotions.¹⁰⁵ No mention however has ever been given to the possible influence the Vespucci might have had in the commission. If it is true that the patron was a decisive agent in the production of a work and that the commission revolved around his taste and needs while fitting the social network he was part of, then it must be asked why the Vespucci endowed their private chapel with a northern orientated decoration, what this reveals about the family's artistic taste, and what considerations the employment of Ghirlandaio made regarding the Vespucci's role as art patrons.¹⁰⁶

The Vespucci's decision to commission a fresco inspired by Flemish art must be perceived in light of the artistic and cultural milieu of fifteenth-century Florence. Flemish artworks started to circulate across Italy from the first few decades of the

¹⁰⁴ MARUCCI AULETTA 1995, 51-148.

¹⁰⁵ CADOGAN 2000, 17.

¹⁰⁶ For the predominant role fifteenth-century patrons played over the artist regarding aesthetic requirements, composition, figures, and the control they maintained on the quality of execution see: HUMFREY 1993, 87-88; SEIDEL 1994, 119-137; THOMAS 1995, 109-137, 256-264. This attitude partially changed in the sixteenth century when the artist was given more freedom to express his fantasy: RUBIN 1994, 201-211.

Quattrocento and by the 1470s northern European models were largely present in Italian collections. Flemish paintings could be found in Florence, Urbino, Naples, Genoa, Milan, Venice and Ferrara, and the network of friendships and alliances that existed between cities and courts must have stimulated the vogue for Netherlandish painting. Examples of northern art arrived in Florence through the fervid activity of Italian merchants and bankers active in Bruges and Antwerp, two bustling commercial centres due to the strategic position of their harbors.¹⁰⁷ Purchases by Italians revolved around canvases, tapestries, altarpieces, portraits, and devotional images, shipped on galleys and then distributed throughout Italy. Patrons began to commission and purchase works on the art market for their own use, serving the increasing demand for luxury goods that characterised Florence in the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁸

The commission and shipping of Flemish artworks mainly revolved around the activity of the Medici and their associates, considered among the first Italian patrons of northern European art.¹⁰⁹ In 1448 Giovanni de' Medici sent Fruosino da Panzano to Bruges to purchase Netherlandish tapestries; in the 1460s Filippo Strozzi and his mother Alessandra were trading pictures from Bruges; in 1474, through the Medici bank, Filippo Strozzi purchased five small paintings on cloth.¹¹⁰ Tommaso Portinari and Angelo Tani, members of the Florentine community active in Bruges and representatives of the Medici bank, also commissioned Flemish paintings in the 1470s: in 1473 the triptych of *The Last Judgement*, commissioned by Angelo Tani from Memling for his chapel in the Badia Fiorentina, was shipped to Florence although it never reached its destination; around 1470 Tommaso Portinari

¹⁰⁷ For the circulation of Flemish artworks in Italy: CASTELFRANCHI VEGAS 1983, 52. For the collection of Flemish artworks in Venice: AIKEMA 1999, 83-91. For the presence of Flemish artworks in Florence: NUTTALL 2004, 105-130 and 2013, 14-51.

¹⁰⁸ For the process and reasons that brought to the formation of the art market between Italy and the Netherlands: NORTH 2002, 53-63. For the economic growth of Florence and the demand of artworks in the fifteenth century (with a specific focus on religious apparatus): GOLDTHWAITE 1993, 12-40 and 72-83. For how the growing demand shaped the art patronage: NAJEMY 2008, 315-323.

¹⁰⁹ MEIJER 2008, 16-21. For the activity of the Medici as bankers in Bruges: DE ROOVER 1963, 317-357. For their involvement in the shipping of good to and from the Flanders: MALLETT 1967, 150-157.

¹¹⁰ NUTTALL 2004, 77-78.

commissioned his portrait and that of his wife Maria Maddalena Baroncelli from Memling.¹¹¹

What contributed to the spread of Netherlandish works was the high appreciation that Italian patrons had of this new type of painting. Fifteenth-century letters, private diaries, and humanist writings provide us with a sense of the elements of northern art which Italian patrons found so appealing. First there was the use of the new oil technique, which allowed a scientific attention to details. Secondly there was the treatment of the landscape particularly admired by Bartolomeo Fazio, a humanist from Genoa who lived at the court of Alfonso of Aragon at Naples.¹¹² As the imitation of nature was the highest standard within a painting, Flemish paintings were considered works of superlative quality, rendering every detail true to life.¹¹³ These mimetic qualities also rendered Flemish art holier to the eyes of the Italians as the detailed lifelikeness and the intensity of emotional expressiveness prompted the spectator's participation in the emotions depicted.¹¹⁴ This is underlined by their application to Netherlandish painting of the term *devoto* and in one case the closely related *pientissimo*. Ciriaco d'Ancona describes Rogier's Ferrara *Lamentation* as 'pientissimo' – 'a most pious image'.¹¹⁵ Alessandra Strozzi, writing in Florence in 1460, describes a Netherlandish picture she has of a *Volto Santo* as 'una divota figura'.¹¹⁶ All these elements had an impact on Florentine

¹¹¹ For the Tani altarpiece: AMES-LEWIS 1996, 82; NUTTALL 2004, 73; NUTTALL 2005, 69. For the presence of Portinari and Tani in the Florentine community in Bruges and for their art commissions: WOLFHAL 2007, 1-21; RIDDERBOS 2008, 38-65. For an analysis of the evolving pattern in Memling's patronage in Italy and the Flanders: MARTENS 1997, 35-41.

¹¹² For an introduction on Fazio and the Italian writings on northern art: BAXANDALL 1971, 97-120; PANOFKY 1971, 3; SELLINK 2002, 213-214; NUTTALL 2008, 22-37.

¹¹³ BORCHERT and HUVERNE 2002, 221-225. NUTTALL 2004, 69. For an overview of the humanist tradition of art criticism in the fifteenth century, and ideas about artistic compositions and the importance for painting to 'express': BAXANDALL 1971, 51-120.

¹¹⁴ NUTTALL 1992, 73. Jennifer Hammerschmidt has recently discussed how the rendering of pain in Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* heightened a sensory response, intensifying the audience's emotional impact. HAMMERSCHMIDT 2013, 201-217.

¹¹⁵ NUTTALL 1992, 73.

¹¹⁶ NUTTALL 1992, 73.

painters such as Leonardo, Filippo Lippi, Verrocchio and Ghirlandaio who employed northern art features in their works.¹¹⁷

Information from archival sources and secondary literature suggests that, just like other Florentines, members of the Vespucci family came into contact with northern European art at least since the first half of the fifteenth century. Evidence shows that several members of the branch of Simone, founder of the Vespucci hospital, had the chance to establish contacts with the north of Europe and it is therefore likely to assume that they got to know its artistic production. The earliest accounts relate to Giovanni di Simone who travelled to Naples in the second decade of the fifteenth century. He stayed at the court of Alfonso V of Aragon (the Magnanimous), a vital humanistic circle in Naples: the king showed his predilection for northern artistic production not only through his collection of miniatures and paintings - such as the Lomellini Triptych highly appreciated by the humanist Bartolomeo Facio – but also by encouraging the cultural exchange between Spain and the north sending the artist Iluis Dalmau from Valencia to Flanders.¹¹⁸ Also Giovanni's brother, Piero di Simone, interacted with the north, having himself travelled to Bruges towards 1414. By 1426 he was closely related with the group of merchants and bankers who expatriated from Florence to Flanders and, as one of Florence's *Consuli del Mare* he drew up the rules to be adopted by the Florentine community in Bruges.¹¹⁹

Piero di Giuliano Vespucci, from the second branch of the family stands out as a particularly interesting personality when considering the years 1467-1480.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ HILLS 1980, 609; CAMPBELL 1983, 675-76; ROWLANDS 1984, 1-7; AMES-LEWIS 1989, 111-122; NASH 2008, 101-119. For the training of the young Ghirlandaio, his debt to Florentine artists and the influence of Flemish works: KECKS 1996, 43-60. For Ghirlandaio and northern art: NUTTALL 1996, 16-22.

¹¹⁸ NUTTALL 2004, 3-4. For Alfonso V in Naples and his collection of books: RYDER 1976, 76-79; MUNOZ VINAS and FARREL 1999, 8, 10. For the reception of Flemish art in Naples and Florence: CANFIELD 1995, 35-42.

¹¹⁹ LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, Folder 'Piero 1394-1450'. Unnumbered folios. Piero Vespucci was a *Consule del Mare* together with Leonardo di Filippo Strozzi and Simone di Pagolo Carnesecchi. The rules were drawn up on 8 February 1426-1427 by the notary Ser Filippo di Ser Ugolino Peruzzi, notary of the *Consuli*, GRUNZWEIG 1930, 86-110.

¹²⁰ LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, Folder 'Piero 1432-1485'. Unnumbered folios.

Friend of the King of Naples, Ferdinand of Aragon, he was sent by him to Constantinople together with the Florentine chronicler Benedetto Dei. It is possible to get an idea of the friendship that linked the two men by analysing the letters sent by Piero to Benedetto in the 1470s. The correspondence, today kept in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana of Florence, attests to the close friendship between the two men - Piero refers to Benedetto as *mio amato* - and provides an insight into the life of Piero Vespucci, an invaluable source to understanding the social environment in which he lived and operated.¹²¹ It appears that Piero Vespucci knew and was a friend of the Portinari family, in particular Accerito and Tommaso (Appendix 3, Documents 1, 3) to whom he sent *chandeles* and often asked to be recommended (Appendix 3, Document 2).¹²² The letters demonstrate his position within Florence, a position of a man who was updated with the latest news from Naples thanks to trustworthy sources and that took part in civic events, such as *giostre*, that would have assured him and his family public visibility. In 1475 in fact he was about to attend a *giostra* for the *Festa del Carmine* in Santo Spirito to which he invited Benedetto, assuring him the event will be just like those he knows the friend likes (Appendix 3, Document 3).¹²³ Piero's presence among filo-medicean citizens attests to the connections with the Medici and their associates, such as the Portinari, managers of the Medici bank in Italy and Europe. This proves interesting when it comes to the circulation of northern art in Florence the Medici and Portinari being among the first families who commissioned and collected Flemish artworks from mid fifteenth century.¹²⁴

¹²¹ PISANI 1923, 116. Indication of this material was found among the papers related to Piero Vespucci at the Library of Congress (Loc, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, Folder 'Piero 1432-1485'. Unnumbered folios). Originals are in BML, Ashburnham, 1841, I, 211; 213; 214; 215. Benedetto Dei in his *Cronica* gives mention of Piero Vespucci and the places they travelled together to on Piero's galley: DEI 1984, 122, 137.

¹²² Both Accerito and Tommaso Portinari had tight ties with the Medici bank. To consider their roles within the Medici enterprise: WOLFHAL 2007, 1-17.

¹²³ For the involvement of Piero in the city *giostre* and games: Chapter 1, p. 59.

¹²⁴ Tommaso Portinari initially acted as Medici agents in Bruges buying Flemish artworks for them and then commissioning and purchasing paintings for himself and his family. For the Medici-Portinari interests in northern art: WOLFHAL 2007, 1-21. For the Medici Bank and Portinari's role: DE ROOVER 1963, Ch. 13.

Although the lack of archival material makes it difficult to establish whether the Vespucci collected and possessed northern works of art, the information gathered on the lives and activities of family members, together with the decoration of the *Cappella della Misericordia*, suggests that they had the chance to assimilate the qualities and aesthetic values of northern artistic production and to 'use' it to their advantage. Through the commission of their family chapel the Vespucci moved towards the same cultural and artistic choices embraced by Florence's elite, aligning themselves with a distinct group of families such as the Portinari and Tani who, by the 1470s, were in close relationship with the Medici with whom they followed specific artistic trends. The Vespucci, men of culture acquainted with the humanistic ideas of the time, must have realised how following specific artistic inclinations would have been 'convenient' to them. Becoming a family, like others before them, whose patronage was shaped by the interaction with the social network that revolved around the Medici would have stabilised the Vespucci status of 'emerging family', bringing the prestige and recognition needed to mark the position the family had started gaining through cultural and civic involvement within the city.¹²⁵

By opting for a commission that closely followed the style of northern European art, the Vespucci fashioned themselves as a family of refined and up to date artistic tastes. If considering the private patronage in Florentine churches across the 1470s, it appears evident that the Vespucci's commission must have been perceived as a rather innovative achievement. Decorations inspired by northern European examples could be found in those years in the chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato, already discussed in Chapter 2, and in the Oratory of San Sebastiano at Santissima Annunziata of Florence. In the latter Antonio Pucci commissioned from the Pollaiuolo brothers the altarpiece representing the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, displayed in the family chapel around 1475.¹²⁶ As Alison Wright discussed, Antonio Pucci's choice of the Pollaiuolo for the

¹²⁵ WOLFTHAL 2007, 2. On the idea of the 'new man' in Quattrocento Florence: BROWN 2002, 113-142.

¹²⁶ Oil on wood, 291.5 x 202.6 cm. London, The National Gallery.

commission of the chapel altarpiece would have been read as an emulation of the Medici. The Medici's *amici* would have, in fact, been acquainted with the Pollaiuolo brothers and their most important works, the *Labours of Hercules*, commissioned for the Medici palace of via Larga.¹²⁷ Similarly, the Vespucci's *Deposition* in Ognissanti would have been seen as a high-class commission, in line with the contemporary trends pursued by the Medici and their kin.

The Vespucci, however, went a step further. Unlike Antonio Pucci they turned their attention to a relatively new artist, previously not employed by the Medici or their associates. The Vespucci were the first to commission the decoration of a private chapel of Florence from the young artist Domenico Ghirlandaio. Their example was later followed by the Sassetti and Tornabuoni who had Ghirlandaio paint their family chapels in Santa Trinita and Santa Maria Novella in the 1480s and in the early 1490s respectively.¹²⁸ This allows us to speculate not only on whether the Vespucci might have set a trend that would have later on see Ghirlandaio as the painter of Florentine family chapels, but also on the possible role of the Vespucci as intermediary between the painter and the Sassetti and Tornabuoni families, the Vespucci being friends with both. It should, in fact, be noted that the Vespucci and Sassetti lived in the same *quartiere*, and that one of the documents relating to the construction of the Sassetti chapel in Santa Trinita was drawn up by Ser Nastagio Vespucci.¹²⁹ The Vespucci strategically tried to gain the favour of the Florentine elite by embracing similar artistic tastes. Family members also aimed to show themselves intellectual equals of the Medici, by employing a new artist later sought by other prominent families. The fresco decoration for the *Cappella della Misericordia* was, at the same time, a question of devotion, an overt homage to the Medici and their related kin, but also a statement of culture,

¹²⁷ WRIGHT 2005, 210-212.

¹²⁸ For the Sassetti chapel in Santa Trinita: BORSOOK and OFFERHAUS 1981, 16-20, 27-52; GOMBRICH 1997, 11-35; BELLINI 1998, 79-88; CADOGAN 2000, 230-236. For the Tornabuoni chapel in Santa Maria Novella: SIMONS 1987, 221-250; HATFIELD 1996, 112-117; BELLINI 1998, 89-100; CADOGAN 2000, 67-90, 236-243.

¹²⁹ BORSOOK and OFFERHAUS 1981, 60.

splendour, and patronage power as the decoration of the *tramezzo*, analysed in the next session, will further demonstrate.¹³⁰

How did the Vespucci get acquainted with Ghirlandaio? Unlike Botticelli, Ghirlandaio did not live close to the family and reasons for their friendship must be looked for outside the geographical boundaries of the *gonfalone* Unicorn.¹³¹ As seen in Chapter 2, from the second half of the fifteenth century the Vespucci started expanding beyond the area surrounding Ognissanti, acquiring properties in other *quartieri* of the city, such as the house purchased in Santa Croce along via dell'Agnolo, the same street where Verrocchio lived. Things get more interesting when considering another aspect overlooked by scholars, namely the fact that in the 1470s Verrocchio was staying *a pigione* in a house belonging to Guidoantonio Vespucci.¹³² This proves the relationship between the Vespucci and Verrocchio and could explain why the family directed its attention towards the young artist Ghirlandaio. Although no documentary evidence links the young Ghirlandaio to the master Verrocchio, the style of Ghirlandaio's early works point to the art of Verrocchio, inviting comparison with some of his sculptures and paintings.¹³³

The choice of Ghirlandaio might also be explained by taking into account the presence of the Vespucci and Ghirlandaio in the Florentine *contado*. Around 1469-70 Ghirlandaio frescoed the church of San Andrea in Brozzi with scenes of the *Baptism of Christ* and the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with SS. Sebastian and Julian* (Figure 69). Little information on the frescoes survives and weak ties with Florentine families who possessed lands and properties around Brozzi have been

¹³⁰ NAJEMY 2008 307-340. The thin line between *magnificencia* and devotion seems to characterise also the Portinari altarpiece: FRANKE 2008, 123-144.

¹³¹ Despite the information provided by Patricia Lee Rubin and Alison Wright, Botticelli and Ghirlandaio were not both neighbours of the Vespucci, RUBIN AND WRIGHT 1999, 62. As Jean Cadogan pointed out, in fact, Ghirlandaio lived with his family near San Lorenzo along via dell'Ariento, CADOGAN 2000, 14.

¹³² This information was first noted and published by Germán Arciniegas. ARCINIEGAS 1955, 91 and 2002, 155.

¹³³ For a discussion on the artistic links between Verrocchio and Ghirlandaio see CADOGAN 2000, 24-27.

established.¹³⁴ Recent investigation has however proved that a more plausible link can be established with the Vespucci who possessed lands in Brozzi since the first half of the fifteenth century. In the *portata* of 1451 Ser Amerigo di Stagio, father of Nastagio and Giorgio Antonio, declares a house located in the *popolo* of San Martino a Brozzi, and in the *portata* of 1470 Nastagio states he possesses a *peso di terra vignata* in the same place.¹³⁵ Brozzi, just outside of Florence, might have been another possible place where the Vespucci could have had the chance to meet or get to know the work of Ghirlandaio.

A final consideration should be made regarding the Badia of Settimo. As seen in Chapter 1, Giorgio Antonio Vespucci worked as a scribe in the Badia of Settimo in his youth. In 1470-1480 Domenico and Davide Ghirlandaio, originally from the village of Scandicci, situated eight kilometers west of Florence, were active in the Badia di Settimo. These are the years in which Davide's *Deposition* altarpiece, Domenico's decoration of the Cappella Maggiore of the Badia di Settimo, and three lost altarpieces are dated.¹³⁶ In the same years the rights for the erection of the *Cappella della Misericordia* were bought by Giorgio Antonio and his brothers Nastagio and Bartolomeo and the chapel's decoration was commissioned from Domenico Ghirlandaio sometime between 1472 and 1476.¹³⁷ The Badia of Settimo might have played a relevant role in this friendship, confirming the *contado* as an important place not only for family bonds and alliances, but also for artistic patronage.

6. Space boundaries: Studying the church *tramezzo*

The presence of the Vespucci within Ognissanti was stressed not only by the family chapels, but also by the church *tramezzo*, the painted wall that since early Christian

¹³⁴ CADOGAN 2000, 191.

¹³⁵ Land and a house in Brozzi are first mentioned in the *catasto* of 1451 and then in 1470: CARACCI 1999a, 13, 17.

¹³⁶ Extant documents of the Badia of Settimo record the payment (dated in 1479) to Ghirlandaio for three new altarpieces: LAMBERINI 1990, 88; CADOGAN 2000, 207-208, 321-322. For the Ghirlandaio brothers as a family of artists: GIANESSELLI 2013, 39-46.

¹³⁷ SCHLEBUSCH 2009, 364-374.

times was used to divide the *ecclesia fratrum* from the *ecclesia laicorum*.¹³⁸ Little attention has been given to this now destroyed screen, and the studies of Irene Hueck and Stefano Giannetti are the only two attempts to reconstruct its structure and decoration.¹³⁹ The lack of information is aggravated by the fact that most guides and descriptions of the city are dated after 1561, the year in which the Humiliati church was passed on to the Franciscans. The new order began extensive renovations of the interior, leaving little of the church's earlier appearance.¹⁴⁰ The *tramezzo* was dismantled in 1564, following the example of Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella.¹⁴¹ While Giannetti's reconstruction of the *tramezzo* aimed to understand its importance as an architectural element of the church, Hueck's study attempted a virtual reconstruction of its decoration (Figure 70). The author identified some of the pictures once displayed on it: Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna*, *Dormitio Virginis*, and his *crocifisso* as well as the two frescoes representing *St. Jerome* and *St. Augustine*, attributed to Ghirlandaio and Botticelli and dated 1480 (Figures 71-72).¹⁴² The cross and the two frescoes are still displayed in the church: while the first is positioned on the left arm of the transept, the other two are placed on the left and right sides of the nave. The two frescoes have long been object of study and questions about their original position on the *tramezzo* and their patronage have been raised.¹⁴³

Hueck's study confirms what had long been suspected: the frescoes were painted in pendant, displayed so that one saint appeared to face the other, placed on the *tramezzo* at either side of the door that led from the *ecclesia fratrum* to the

¹³⁸ VALERIO 2008, 159-160.

¹³⁹ HUECK 1992, 37-50; GIANNETTI 2011, 49-57.

¹⁴⁰ MILLER and TAYLOR MITCHELL 2004, 174. Among the guides and descriptions that cite Ognissanti and describe its interior after the Franciscans: BOCCHI 1971 (1591), 100-102; RICHA 1972, 258-9. Other eighteenth-century sources are mentioned in BATAZZI and GIUSTI 1992, 7. There is, furthermore, a *Descrizione della Chiesa e del Convento di Ognissanti* (1691) in the Ognissanti archive (ASPSFS).

¹⁴¹ For the study – and reconstruction – of the Florentine *tramezzi* in Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella: HALL 1979, 16-32. For the *tramezzo* in Florence's San Remigio: BANDINI 2012, 211-230.

¹⁴² HUECK 1992, 37-50; MILLER and TAYLOR MITCHELL 2004, 165.

¹⁴³ Vasari reported that the frescoes had been moved, after the Franciscans took over in the church, on the walls of the nave after the *tramezzo* was dismantled. He informs us that the transfer of frescoes was carried out even in his days and relates that this difficult operation was done by sawing off whole blocks of wall held together with chains, PROCACCI 1968, 32; VASARI 1967, vol. 3, 157-158.

ecclesia laicorum.¹⁴⁴ The painted architecture that frames the saints must have acted as a joining element of the frescoes once in their original location. This reconstruction is convincing when similar typologies of works that were produced in Florence around 1480 are considered. The first example is the Sacrestia delle Messe in Santa Maria del Fiore: here the scenes above the door are divided, yet unified, by a fake architecture (Figure 73). The second is the wooden door in the Sala dei Gigli of Palazzo Vecchio, designed by Botticelli around 1480, in which Dante and Petrarch are enclosed in niches facing each other (Figure 74). The third is Botticelli's *Transfiguration*, where the two saints are turned towards the central panel in the same way as the *tramezzo* frescoes were facing the door (Figure 75).

The similar layout of the two frescoes and the common painted architecture that once joined them brings one to assume they were part of the same commission. A small detail, painted on the *St. Augustine* fresco had, however, raised doubts about the identity of the patron of the works. Above *St. Augustine's* head is displayed the Vespucci coat of arms: golden wasps on a blue band in a red field. *St. Jerome*, however, does not bear any family symbol. Several hypotheses have been advanced by scholars: there are those who think that *St. Augustine* should be considered a Vespucci commission while *St. Jerome* a Humiliati one; those who suggest they were both commissioned by the Vespucci; and those who believe that both images were commissioned by the order.¹⁴⁵ Despite the lack of archival material, a careful visual analysis of the frescoes can provide an insight into the Vespucci's involvement in the decoration. The next section will investigate what part the Vespucci played in the decoration of the *tramezzo*, which family member was in charge of the commission, and what it meant for the family to have its coat of arms displayed on the most prominent wall of the church.

¹⁴⁴ HUECK 1992, 41-47; STAPLEFORD 1994, 74. The presence of frescoes on the *tramezzo* of Ognissanti might not have been unusual: Walter and Elizabeth Paatz, in fact, recorded the presences of two frescoes by Perugino on the *tramezzo* of San Giusto in Florence, PAATZ and PAATZ 1955, 277-278. I am grateful to Joanne Allen for pointing out this reference to me.

¹⁴⁵ For a chronological overview of the various hypotheses: CECCHI 2005, 395.

7. New patronage considerations regarding *St. Augustine* and *St. Jerome*

In the Renaissance, St. Jerome and St. Augustine were celebrated as examples of scholarly and spiritual virtues.¹⁴⁶ Both aspects are in fact embodied by the saints depicted in Ognissanti in 1480: *St. Jerome* is depicted staring at the beholder, his head resting in his hand; while *St. Augustine* is represented during his vision of St. Jerome. Both saints are shown in their *studioli*, surrounded by a variety of objects including books, scissors, a candle, a clock, an armillary sphere, a geometrical treatise, and a Turkish carpet. The analysis of these objects, together with a broader consideration of the frescoes, enabled scholars to establish strong links between the pictures and the Medici family. The first link comes from the fact that Ghirlandaio's *St. Jerome* seems to have been inspired by Van Eyck's panel (Figure 76) that, representing the same subject, is listed in the Medici inventories.¹⁴⁷ The second 'hint' is given by the colour of the books depicted on the shelf in *St. Augustine*. According to Richard Stapleford, they seem to follow the colour-coded bindings used to signify subject classification adopted by the Medici: blue to designate sacred books; dark red for poetry; white for philosophy; green for art; and yellow for grammar.¹⁴⁸ The connections that could be established between the frescoes and the Medici allowed scholars to assume that these were due to the social and political relationship existing between the Vespucci and Medici families.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, when looking for a patron among the Vespucci, attention was focused on the branch that seems to have maintained a close relationship with the Medici. This was identified in the line of Amerigo the explorer, and the name of Giorgio Antonio Vespucci as a possible patron was singled out.¹⁵⁰ As discussed in

¹⁴⁶ RICE 1985, 84-115; GILL 2005, 3-39.

¹⁴⁷ It is generally recognised that Ghirlandaio took as a model for his *St. Jerome* a panel representing the same subject that, attributed to Van Eyck, listed in the Medici's inventories of 1456-1463 and 1492. The panel, today in Detroit's Institute of Art, is very similar to the description given in the Medici's documents but as the provenance of the panel is unknown any link between the two pictures must remain speculative, CADOGAN 2000, 217; PANOFKY 1971, 1-2; FARBAKY 2013, 210-213; NUTTALL 2013, 41-42.

¹⁴⁸ STAPLEFORD 1994, 77.

¹⁴⁹ GILL 2005, 235 n. 21; STAPLEFORD 1994, 79.

¹⁵⁰ LIGHTBOWN 1978, 38-40; KEMP 1984, 213; STAPLEFORD 1994, 79 n. 36; CADOGAN 2000, 18; DOMBROWSKI 2010, 137-139.

Chapter 1, a well-known humanist in the Medici entourage and, later on, a friar, Giorgio Antonio would have certainly found the figure of the church father inspiring, perhaps identifying himself in the scholarly and spiritual dimensions that characterised the saint.

Several elements point towards Giorgio Antonio as the patron of *St. Augustine*. As seen in Chapter 1, Giorgio Antonio possessed many manuscripts. His collection included works in Latin and Greek and, among the others, featured the *Confessions* of St. Augustine. It is not known if Giorgio Antonio possessed a *studiolo*, or small library, in his house, but it should be questioned whether the depiction of the desk and objects in *St. Augustine* could be taken as a reflection of Giorgio Antonio's possessions rather than those of the Medici. This would however not utterly exclude a subtle Medici connection, taking into consideration Giorgio Antonio's close relationship with the family when he became Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici's private tutor in 1476.¹⁵¹ This relationship with the Medici certainly favoured Giorgio Antonio's admission to the religious and intellectual Medici circles, such as the *Compagnia de' Magi* and the Neoplatonic circle of Ficino.¹⁵² As noted in Chapter 2, one of Giorgio Antonio's closest friends, Ficino made his entrance as heir to a tradition of Augustinian learning, often mentioning the Church Father's writings in his *Theologia Platonica*, and sharing Augustine's ideas on the soul's relation to the body, the place of God in the mind, and the theory of divine illumination.¹⁵³ Another aspect that brought scholars to identify

¹⁵¹ The friendly relationship between Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Giorgio Antonio Vespucci clearly emerges from two surviving letters in the ASF, MAP. The first letter, sent on 19 November 1489 by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco to Amerigo Vespucci, concerned the health of Giorgio Antonio whose life was in danger due to a bad illness. The second letter, sent on 20 November 1489 by Zanobi Acciaiuoli to Amerigo Vespucci, announced Giorgio Antonio's recovery and remembered that both Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de' Medici had to heart Giorgio Antonio's health, considering him like a father. Both documents are mentioned in MARTINI 1955, 11.

¹⁵² Giorgio Antonio was a member of the Medicean *Compagnia de' Magi*, a lay confraternity that, engaging with many devotional activities, had an important role in Florence's religious life. Members of the *Compagnia* such as Donato Acciaiuoli, Cristoforo Landino, Pier Filippo Pandolfini and Giorgio Antonio Vespucci produced sermons that have been said to reflect Ficino's platonic ideas, often in relation to the idea of light. For the *Compagnia de' Magi*, their activities and writings: HATFIELD 1970, 144; VENTRONE 1992b, 139-140.

¹⁵³ For Ficino and Giorgio Antonio: ULLMAN and STADTER 1972, 38; BALDINI 2004a, 66; *The Letters* 1975, vol. 1, 50 n.10; vol. 2, 28, n. 21, vol. 3, 8, n.5; vol. 4, 58, n. 43; vol 4, 63, n. 47; vol 5, 32, n. 16; vol. 6,

Giorgio Antonio as the patron of *St. Augustine* is the presence of specific objects within the fresco. Martin Kemp noted the strong relationship between the armillary sphere, the geometrical treatise and the clock with the meaning of time, geometry and celestial orbits, essential to astronomical calculation.¹⁵⁴ Kemp linked the presence of these objects to Giorgio Antonio's interests in cosmography and cosmology, identifying the humanist not only as a point of reference for the spread of classical culture and the circulation of scientific knowledge, but recognizing his involvement in Florentine cartographic production.¹⁵⁵

The mechanical clock that features in *St. Augustine* is also worthy of attention (Figure 77). Placed in the background next to the geometrical treatise, the clock has previously attracted little attention and, considered exclusively for its shape and meaning, it has never been examined in relation to the Vespucci.¹⁵⁶ A closer analysis, however, reveals potentially interesting connections with the family, and the information retrieved from extant archival material suggests the presence of a similar object within Giorgio Antonio's belongings. As seen in Chapter 1 the will that Ser Paolo Grassi drew up for Giorgio Antonio in 1499 listed the institutions to which the friar bequeathed his extensive collection of manuscripts. The paragraph related to the Dominican convent of Santa Maria del Sasso revealed that, together with books and manuscripts, Giorgio Antonio also donated a clock. Described as a *horologium unum ex ferro et orichalcho et excitatorium cum capsula et campana et suis pertinentiis*, this has to be identified as a monastic clock.¹⁵⁷

7, n. 3. Vol. 6, 14-17, n. 10. The two humanists had probably the chance to regularly meet at the *Studio Fiorentino* where Ficino lectured and where Giorgio Antonio studied and – perhaps – taught. For the presence of Guidoantonio and other members of the Vespucci family in the *Studio*: VERDE 1972, vol 3, 108, 164-65, 506-507, 742, 1070-1073. For Ficino's involvement in the activities of the *Studio*: DAVIES 1992, 785-790. On Ficino and his relation to Neoplatonism and *St. Augustine*: KRISTELLER 1965, 37-53; CELENZA 2007, 72-96. For representations of *St. Augustine* in which the light becomes the carrier of higher and heavenly meanings: SCHNAUBELT and VAN FLETEREN 1999, 512.

¹⁵⁴ KEMP 1984, 211; CADOGAN 2000, 218.

¹⁵⁵ On the presence of atlases and cartographic material among Giorgio Antonio's possessions: GENTILE 1992, 193-197, 215-217.

¹⁵⁶ PANCHERI 2005, 53.

¹⁵⁷ Appendix 2, Document 2. According to the description, the clock was made of iron and copper (for the meaning of *orichalcho*: BATTAGLIA 1984, 94). I am indebted to the editorial group of the journal *Hora* for having guided me in the research of fifteenth-century mechanical clocks. Brief

Comprising a round quadrant and a complex system of weights and counter-weights, monastic clocks were characterised by the presence of *excitatoria*, or alarms, used by the monks to divide the daily hours between work and prayer.¹⁵⁸ The quadrant showed twenty-four segments, one for each hour, and bore similarities with the quadrant of bigger public clocks displayed on city towers or within churches, such as the one depicted by Paolo Uccello on the *controfacciata* of Santa Maria Novella.¹⁵⁹ Botticelli's *St. Augustine* has been considered one of the first visual representations of a monastic clock, followed by many others between the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth-century.¹⁶⁰ Nicoletta Baldini suggested a later execution date of 1484 for *St. Augustine*, the year in which the Florentine Lorenzo dalla Volpaia produced a clock similar to the one frescoed by Botticelli.¹⁶¹ Investigation into Renaissance mechanical clocks, however, makes it difficult to embrace Baldini's hypothesis and Antonio Simoni has already argued that the artist employed an older model likely to have been realised before 1480.¹⁶² The studies of Giuseppe Brusa, moreover, proved that the clock built by Lorenzo dalla Volpaia in 1484 was a planetary one. It does not seem wrong to argue that Lorenzo's clock must have differed from the one depicted by Botticelli: according to the tradition of planetary clocks it probably consisted of two quadrants, one displaying the twenty-four hours of the day, and another featuring the symbols of the zodiac, as the reconstruction of a later example shows (Figure 78).¹⁶³

discussions of Botticelli's clock can be found in: SIMONI 1965, 67; GENTILE 2000, 110-111; PANCHERI 2005, 52-53.

¹⁵⁸ SIMONI 1965, 16-25.

¹⁵⁹ For the presence and role of clocks in religious and civic contexts: GUAITOLI 2005, 23-28. For the connection of monastic clocks to religious rituals and as an attribute of modern citizenship: MUIR 1997, 78-79. For the development of the wheeled clock: DOHRN 1996, 45-117.

¹⁶⁰ For a list of the wooden *tarsie* featuring monastic clocks see: MAGISTRETTI 2005, 145-156.

¹⁶¹ GENTILE 2000, 110-111. The clock is now lost.

¹⁶² SIMONI 1965, 67.

¹⁶³ A reconstruction of a later planetary clock by Lorenzo dalla Volpaia is today displayed in Museo Galilei of Florence. It comprises of a mechanic clock, a quadrant showing the hours and the symbols of the zodiac, and celestial and terrestrial spheres. On the life of Lorenzo dalla Volpaia, his activity as a clock-maker, and the two astronomical clocks realised in 1484 and 1498: BRUSA 1994, 645-669; PAGLIARA 1989, available online [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/lorenzo-della-volpaia_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/lorenzo-della-volpaia_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

The reason for the inclusion of the clock in the fresco has been the object of debate. As *St. Augustine* has been interpreted as representing the moment of the saint's vision of St. Jerome, Lightbown linked the position of the clock's hour hand to the time of this vision.¹⁶⁴ Damian Dombrowski, however, has argued that the representation of the time on the clock face is ambiguous and that Botticelli lacked precision indicating the hour, making it impossible to link it to the moment of the vision.¹⁶⁵ According to Dombrowski this would also explain the meaning of the inscription on the frieze that frames the saint: SIC AUGUSTINUS SACRIS SE TRADIDIT UT NON MUTATUM SIBI ADHUC SENSERIT ESSE LOCUM.¹⁶⁶ Rather than referring to the vision of St. Jerome, this sentence must be interpreted as the moment of ecstasy of the saint which raises him above reality and takes him to a higher place.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the clock painted by Botticelli can be identified as the one mentioned in the will of 1499. The precise, yet general, description offered by the document does not provide information on the execution date of the clock and it also raises doubts as to its nature: the presence of the *excitatoria*, in fact, can apply to both monastic and planetary clocks. The presence of a clock in Botticelli's fresco, however, certainly establishes an interesting connection with the Vespucci and promotes further consideration of the family's position in Florence's humanistic circles. Although scant details survive on the commission, use, and circulation of domestic mechanic clocks, these objects seem to have attracted the attention of those humanists such as Poliziano, Ficino, Lorenzo de' Medici, and Mattias Corvinus interested in time measuring instruments.¹⁶⁷ The Medici also possessed several *oriuoli* - planetary and non – as

¹⁶⁴ LIGHTBOWN 1989, 76.

¹⁶⁵ DOMBROWSKI 2010, 144-145.

¹⁶⁶ 'So did Augustine surrender himself to the study of things sacred that he has not yet sensed his change of place', CADOGAN 2000, 216.

¹⁶⁷ Vasari recorded Brunelleschi and Verrocchio among the first Florentine clock-makers (PANCHERI 2005, 54). Poliziano and Ficino enthusiastically described Lorenzo della Volpaia's clock. A bigger and more elaborate version of the clock was commissioned in 1498 by Mattias Corvinus who shared the same cultural predilection of the Medici and their entourage.

the family's inventories of the fifteenth century demonstrate.¹⁶⁸ The presence of the mechanical clock in *St. Augustine*, therefore, bears implicit connections to Giorgio Antonio and his interests in science and astronomy that found fertile ground in Florence intellectual centres. At the same time it also overtly alludes to the monastic tradition of time measuring which Giorgio Antonio, due to his religious background, would have been well acquainted with.¹⁶⁹

Although the points outlined seem to strongly suggest Giorgio Antonio's involvement in the commission of *St. Augustine*, establishing whether he was the only patron of the work is more difficult to prove. Commissioning works of art in fifteenth-century Florence was a matter of business that engaged artists and clients in a process of negotiation, stipulation, and monetary allocation normally recorded in written contracts.¹⁷⁰ Unfortunately the lack of notarial records makes it impossible to determine the terms, conditions, and payment procedures of the *tramezzo* commission.¹⁷¹ Due to his scholarly and spiritual inclinations, Giorgio Antonio would have been in a position to decide what the fresco subject and structure should be. Communication between Botticelli and his patron would have certainly been facilitated by their vicinity as, at the time, they were both living along via Nuova. As seen in Chapter 2, Botticelli was not only an employee of the Vespucci, but also a family neighbour and friend, key elements at the basis of Florentine patronage dynamics.¹⁷² Connections to Botticelli might have, therefore, also been prompted by the friendship established with the artist in the 1470s by

¹⁶⁸ SPALLANZANI and BERTELÀ 1992, 27, 46-47, 107, 150, 202; SPALLANZANI 1996, 19, 22, 60, 119. The inventory of Palazzo Medici of 1492 has been recently republished by Richard Stapleford: STAPLEFORD 2013, 61-194.

¹⁶⁹ On Giorgio Antonio interest for astronomy, science, and cartography and his relationship with influential personalities known to have shared the same passions: PANCHERI 2005, 52-54; MARCELLI 2012, 38.

¹⁷⁰ O'MALLEY 2005, 1-12. For artists-patrons written agreements and contracts: GLASSER 1977, Ch.2 and 3; KEMP 1997, 32-78.

¹⁷¹ Girolamo Mei was the notary who drew the contract through which Nastagio, Giorgio Antonio and Bartolomeo acquired the patronage rights for their family chapel around 1472. The volume that gathers the documentation produced by the notary in the years 1476-1483, however, does not include any other documents related to the Vespucci or Ognissanti: ASF, NA 9871 [Ser Girolamo Mei 1477-1483].

¹⁷² For the Vespucci-Botticelli patronage in relation to the *St. Augustine*: GALLORI 1995, 80-81.

personalities belonging to other branches of the Vespucci family, as Chapter 4 will discuss.

The hypothesis that Giorgio Antonio might have been the sole patron of *St. Augustine* seems, however, to be less likely in the light of archival documents that suggest he was not in a position to pay Botticelli for his work. The tax declarations submitted by Giorgio Antonio and his relatives convey a good sense of the economic situation of this branch of the Vespucci family when the fresco was commissioned. In the *catasto* of 1480, Giorgio Antonio appeared in two *portate*: one submitted by his nephew Giovanni, the other by Giorgio Antonio himself.¹⁷³ While the first simply states that Giovanni and his uncle were sharing the same house in Borgo Ognissanti, the second provides an insight into the life, activity, and desires of Giorgio Antonio. Differing from the conventional typology of Florentine tax declarations, the document is a self-admission of his life's objectives. Giorgio Antonio professes his desire to become a churchman, leaving behind lay activities and privileges, and admits to have no work or sources of income.¹⁷⁴ Kemp illustrated the difficulty in ascertaining an accurate idea of Renaissance payments, as not only did the price of artistic works fluctuate considerably, but payments were often made in the less quantifiable form of living costs, or in the provision of commodities like houses.¹⁷⁵ Living and working in the same *gonfalone* as the Vespucci, Botticelli did not need a house, so the payment is likely to have been in cash. Being in a difficult financial situation, Giorgio Antonio would have struggled to meet the costs required for the production of Botticelli's fresco and he probably benefited from the financial support of other members of his family such as his brother Nastagio.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicornio, 2448 (1480), f.18r.

¹⁷⁴ 'Giorgio Antonio di ser Amergo Vespucci. Voglio essere religioso et di già sono in habito et tonsure. Ordinerommi a' tempi: et chome secolare et laycho non voglio più graveca nè usare nè godere alchuno privilegio nè uficio nè exercitione sechulare. Et do questa scripta solo per ubidire a' bandi et alle leggi et deliberation vostre'. ASF, Santa Maria Novella, Unicornio, Catasto, 2448 (1480), f.18r.

¹⁷⁵ KEMP 1997, 118-163.

¹⁷⁶ Horne suggested that *St. Augustine* might have been painted for Nastagio, HORNE 1980, 70-71.

Referred to as *civis et notarius publicus florentinus*, Nastagio appears to have been one of the most influential members of this family branch and his involvement in the commission of the *tramezzo* decoration should not be altogether excluded. By 1480 he, among his brothers, was in the most favourable economic condition as his tax declarations, previously only looked at for information on Amerigo the explorer, witness.¹⁷⁷ The *portate* drawn up between 1457 and 1480 reveal a steady increase in Nastagio's possessions that coincided with his social/professional climb within Florence. Born in the second decade of the fifteenth century, by 1457 he was a notary at the Arte dei Vaiai, living with his wife in Borgo Ognissanti where he rented the property of Ser Filippo di Bettino for 30 florins per year.¹⁷⁸ In 1458 and 1461 he worked as Ufficiale del Monte earning enough to buy Giorgio Antonio's land in Peretola from his brother, and to give 200 florins to Luca Bartolegli, who was allowing Nastagio and his family to live in his house in Borgo Ognissanti. As seen before, in 1472 he joined forces with his brothers Giorgio Antonio and Bartolomeo, acquiring the rights for their family chapel, while in 1474 he purchased his own house in the *gonfalone* Unicorn. In the same years he paid for yearly masses in honour of his father Amerigo, and bought two pieces of lands in the *contado*, respectively at San Felice at Ema and San Marco. In 1480 he became notary at the Arte del Cambio while his first-born Antonio became notary at the *Palazzo del Podestà*.¹⁷⁹

Beyond his economic stability, Nastagio's personal interests provide reasons for his potential involvement in the *tramezzo* commission. Studies on Giorgio Antonio have shown that he did not embark on the activity as a scribe alone, but was helped by his two brothers, Nastagio and Bartolomeo.¹⁸⁰ Nastagio might have shared Giorgio Antonio's passion for knowledge and books, an interest probably fed by the studies he engaged in to become a notary.¹⁸¹ He also entrusted Giorgio Antonio to educate his son Amerigo who, as the surviving letters and manuscripts

¹⁷⁷ LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 10-87.

¹⁷⁸ LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 16.

¹⁷⁹ LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 23.

¹⁸⁰ DE LA MARE 1985, 447.

¹⁸¹ NAJEMY 2008, 45-50.

prove, was taught Latin and Greek by his uncle.¹⁸² As the two brothers worked together on more than one occasion, a joint commission of *St. Augustine* may have suited both of them. The image of the saint-scholar would have been congenial to Giorgio Antonio's interest in pursuing an ideal life based on spiritual contemplation and learning: this is the message that *St. Augustine*, placed in a predominant, frontal position, would have conveyed to all the church attendants who would have been aware of the use and function of the *studiolo*.¹⁸³ On the other hand Nastagio, a civic notary, might have gained public visibility as the fresco displayed on the *tramezzo* bore the family's coat of arms. The picture, together with the patronage of the three private chapels, would have marked the presence of the Vespucci in the church, and served as a reflection of the power the family had been slowly acquiring, holding, and managing inside and outside of the *gonfalone*.

Although it was not unusual to allow families to decorate church spaces and place their coat of arms as a signature of power and patronage, the fluid nature of the *tramezzo* commission in Ognissanti raises questions about whether the decorative choices were intended to suit both the Vespucci and the Humiliati's interests. As for *St. Augustine*, it is possible that the order was devoted to this saint. Lacking a founder or a rule to identify with, the Humiliati were strongly influenced by those of others, such as the Cistercians and the Dominicans, from whom they derived part of their liturgy, clerical structure and, possibly, the predilection for St. Augustine.¹⁸⁴ Ghirlandaio's *St. Jerome* might also provide a link between the Vespucci and the Humiliati, however it presents more problematic aspects. Inscribed in the frieze above the saint a line reads: REDDE NOS CLAROS LAMPAS RADIO[SA] SINE QUA TERRA TOTA EST HUMBROSA, 'Illuminate us, O radiant light, otherwise the whole world would be dark'.¹⁸⁵ Cadogan has noted that this

¹⁸² The notebook that the young Amerigo used for his Latin exercises is today at the Biblioteca Riccardiana. The ASF also preserve a letter written in Latin by Amerigo and addressed to his father Nastagio in 1476. The letter is published in LUZZANA CARACI 1999, 19-21.

¹⁸³ Family of medium-high social status would have had a private *studiolo* or a small library at home, THORNTON 1997, 1-7.

¹⁸⁴ MILLER and TAYLOR-MITCHELL 2004, 160. For an account of the rule of the early Humiliati: ANDREWS 1999, 99-135.

¹⁸⁵ CADOGAN 2000, 216.

inscription was taken from a hymn in the *Hyeronymianus* by Johannes Andreae, one of the great canonists of the Middle Ages whose most influential writings were the commentaries on papal decretals.¹⁸⁶

Perhaps the words 'lampas radiosa' might refer to Neoplatonic/Ficinian concepts according to which men could reach the intangible world being illuminated by divine light.¹⁸⁷ In 1997 Marco Lunari pointed out the connections between the late fifteenth-century decoration of the *Sala della Musica* in the Humiliati abbey of Viboldone (Lombardy) and Ficino's ideas as revealed in his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*.¹⁸⁸ Despite Lunari's invitation to explore further the links between the Humiliati order and Neoplatonic philosophy, this aspect has never been examined. It is beyond the scope of this study to search for the connections between the Humiliati and Neoplatonism, but it should be stressed that Lunari's considerations provide an exemplary case of the Humiliati's tendency to embrace humanistic ideas. It is not known why the hymn from Johannes Andreae was chosen to be placed above *St. Jerome*, but it should be noted that among Giorgio Antonio's books were the *Decretals* of Gregorio IX. The edition the Vespucci possessed presented marginal glosses derived from the comments of Johannes Andreae to the *Decretals*.¹⁸⁹ The link established between Giorgio Antonio and Johannes Andreae through the manuscript the Vespucci possessed bridges the gap between Giorgio Antonio and *St. Jerome*, and increases the possibilities of the fresco being commissioned by the family.

The Hebrew scroll (Figure 79) represented hanging from the shelf of the *studiolo* is also significant. Translated by Martin Kemp, together with the Greek scroll positioned below, it has not attracted much attention. While the Greek scroll cites a passage from Psalm 51 – 'Oh God have mercy on me according to your great piety' -, the Hebrew scroll, only partly legible, contains the names of the angels

¹⁸⁶ CADOGAN 2000, 216; MARCHAND 2012, 112. Information on Johannes Andreae is scarce, but mention of this canonist is given in VAN HOVE 1908, available online: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04670b.htm>.

¹⁸⁷ For the theory of illumination in Neoplatonism: SCHIAVONE 1963, 160-164.

¹⁸⁸ LUNARI 1997, 65.

¹⁸⁹ FABBRI and TACCONI 1997, 125.

Kemuel, Uzziel and the line 'I still call out in anguish/My lament is troubling me'.¹⁹⁰ No doubt both texts are an allusion to St. Jerome's activity as the translator of the Bible, but further considerations can be made for the Hebrew scroll. Kemp suggested the nature of the Hebrew inscription, recognising it as cabalistic, bearing connections to the realms of Christian cabalism, in particular to Pico della Mirandola.¹⁹¹ Studies of Renaissance Judaism and Florentine humanism have highlighted the growing interest in Hebrew texts in the last few years of the fifteenth century, which involved personalities such as Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. The latter, in particular, learned Hebrew and explored the Jewish tradition of the Kabbalah.¹⁹² A close friend of Ficino and a member of Florence's humanistic circles, Giorgio Antonio was almost certainly aware of the ongoing interest in Hebrew studies and it is noticeable that Johannes Reuchlin who, as seen in Chapter 2, studied under his tutelage, later wrote *On the art of the Kabbalah* (1517). Although there is no surviving information about Giorgio Antonio's interest in Hebrew studies or cabalism, the Hebrew and Greek scrolls in Ghirlandaio's painting may be interpreted in light of Giorgio Antonio's interests in ancient languages and studies, thus fostering a link between the Vespucci and the fresco.

Beyond the Hebrew scroll and the frieze inscription, *St. Jerome* presents further elements that can establish a connection between the fresco and the Vespucci. In comparison to Van Eyck's *St. Jerome* (Figure 76) where the saint is represented in his *studiolo* with books, pen and ink, an hour-glass, the cardinal hat, and the lion, Ghirlandaio creates a more lavish space where materiality equals richness: the oriental rug on the writing desk, the black rosary beads hanging above the saint's head, the two majolica pieces and transparent glass containers positioned on top of the shelf, the concave lense glasses, the candleholder, the engraved scissors, and the red seal on the desk. The visual analysis of some of these objects, and their contextualisation within the mercantile and consumer culture of

¹⁹⁰ First translated in KEMP 1984, 213-214 and confirmed in CADOGAN 2000, 216. The textual source has not been identified.

¹⁹¹ KEMP 1984, 213-214.

¹⁹² I thank Stephen Bowd for having shown me the draft of his forthcoming study on humanism and Jews in Renaissance Florence. On Pico della Mirandola and Kabbalah: COPENHAVER 2002, 56-81.

fifteenth-century Florence, can give us an insight into the artistic taste and social position of the patron, supporting the possibility of identifying the Vespucci as patrons of the work.

The studies of Marco Spallanzani on Italian Renaissance rugs showed that fifteenth-century Florentine galleys that sailed to the Middle East, shipped oriental merchandise back to Italy, including rugs.¹⁹³ The demand for these exotic and precious objects was very high and the Florentine clientele included the Medici, the Strozzi, the Capponi, and the Gondi families. The rug that features in Ghirlandaio's *St. Jerome* resembled the Turkish ones that circulated in Florence during the fifteenth century: the borders of Ghirlandaio's carpet, depicted in a pseudo-Kufic style, allude to the geometrical and calligraphic patterns of Islamic decorations. Marco Spallanzani's studies of Italian Renaissance rugs showed that fifteenth-century Florentine galleys that sailed to the Middle East shipped oriental merchandise back to Italy, including rugs from Syria, Turkey and Constantinople. The demand was very high and the Florentine clientele included the Medici, the Strozzi, the Capponi, and the Gondi families, for whom the acquisition of these exotic and precious objects reflected taste and status.¹⁹⁴ Rugs could be seen both in private and public spaces. In houses, small rugs were used for decorative purposes to cover furniture, particularly *lettucci*, chests, and writing desks, as Ghirlandaio's rug, spread over St. Jerome's desk, shows.¹⁹⁵ The use of rugs is also recorded in churches for ceremonial processions and funerals, as visually exemplified in Ghirlandaio's *Funeral of Saint Fina* (Figure 43), where the dead body of the saint lays on a bier covered by a lavishly decorated oriental rug.

The demand for luxurious and exotic objects in the Quattrocento also included majolica pieces. Shipped from Spain, majolica was sought by and displayed in the houses of wealthy Florentine families, as the archival inventories analysed by

¹⁹³ SPALLANZANI 2007, 35.

¹⁹⁴ SPALLANZANI 2007, 36-51.

¹⁹⁵ SPALLANZANI 2007, 51.

Spallanzani showed.¹⁹⁶ The two overlooked majolica containers depicted by Ghirlandaio (Figure 79) can be connected to real examples that circulated in Florence at the time (Figure 80). Decorated in a hispano-moresque looking design, their shape recalls that of the *albarelli* that were used to store a wide range of products, and were to be found in apothecary shops and in private homes, as demonstrated by surviving inventories and visual evidence: a similar *albarello* is represented by Ghirlandaio in the *Birth of St. John the Baptist* in the Cappella Tornabuoni (Figure 81). One of the *albarelli* depicted in the *St. Jerome* bears the monogram 'IHS' that refers to the holy name of Jesus, and this often adorned majolica plates and containers (Figure 82). Interestingly, majolica with the IHS monogram also appears in contemporary inventories such as that of the merchant Iacopo di Giovanni Ottavanti, drawn up in 1480.¹⁹⁷

Spain could be cited as the place of provenance of the necklace hanging from the shelf above St. Jerome (Figure 79). In all probability it is meant to represent rosary beads, similar to the one Ghirlandaio painted in the *Portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni*, where a string of red coral beads is displayed in the background (Figure 83). The black colour may refer to the jetstone largely used in Spain, especially in the area near Santiago de Compostela.¹⁹⁸ As François Quiviger noted, Renaissance rosary beads often included a medallion with an image.¹⁹⁹ A medal seems to have once been depicted as part of Ghirlandaio's necklace, but the damaged fresco, and the loss of pigment relating to the medallion, makes it impossible to discern what was represented there and to advance further hypotheses as to the provenance of the prayer beads.

Attention must finally be given to the glasses displayed in the foreground, next to the beautifully engraved scissors (Figure 79). Although the glasses could symbolically allude to both the intellectual faculties of St. Jerome and the episode of his vision, they can also be interpreted in light of the production and circulation

¹⁹⁶ SPALLANZANI 2006, 9-14.

¹⁹⁷ SPALLANZANI 1986, 164-170.

¹⁹⁸ I am grateful to Rachel King for helping me with this identification.

¹⁹⁹ QUIVIGER 2010, 44.

of spectacles in Florence, where a specimen similar to that represented by Ghirlandaio was discovered (Figure 84). Vincent Ilardi discussed the production of concave lenses, arguing that Florence was the leading manufacturing centre for high quality spectacles in the fifteenth century.²⁰⁰ According to the author, the Medici fostered the exportation of glasses across Italy as the surviving letters of the woodcarver Arduino da Baiso and the Cardinal Iacopo Ammannati Piccolomini witness. In their correspondence with Cosimo de' Medici and Lorenzo il Magnifico (1451 and 1473 respectively), both men thanked the Medici for the glasses they received by means of Pigello Portinari and Donato Acciaiuoli.

It is interesting to note that Bartolomeo Vespucci's inventory of 1479 (Appendix 2, Document 4), briefly discussed in Chapter 1, listed most of the objects so far discussed: three rugs, a string of jetstone (*ambra nera*), thirty-tree majolica pieces, and five brass candleholders. As these objects circulated in Bartolomeo's house it is likely that his brothers Nastagio and Giorgio Antonio would have been acquainted with them.²⁰¹ The will of Giorgio Antonio of 1497 also listed a tapestry with a flowery pattern (*panno d'arazzo fiorito*).²⁰² Like the monastic clock in *St. Augustine*, a secure connection between the objects represented in the *St. Jerome* and those possessed by the Vespucci cannot be established. Nonetheless, each of the objects included in the painting seem to have been carefully chosen not only for their ornamental function, but also for their links to the artistic taste of Florence's elite, thus marking out the identity and social position of the patron. Through the decoration of the *tramezzo* the Vespucci emphasised their position among the wealthiest families of the city, showing their awareness of Florence's prestige in manufacturing and commercial trade, and demonstrating how up-to-date they were to the latest fashionable artistic choices.

The objects displayed in *St. Jerome*, together with the frieze inscription on top of the fresco, support the possibility of the Vespucci being the patron of

²⁰⁰ ILARDI 2007, 75-115.

²⁰¹ ASF, Corp. Sopp., 74, 101, I, ff. 42r-43v.

²⁰² Appendix 2, Document 1.

Ghirlandaio. If it is true, as seen earlier, that *St. Jerome* and *St. Augustine* were framed by the same painted architecture, then it must be assumed that the images were once perceived as part of the same composition, on which the Vespucci coat of arms dominated as a 'signature of patronage'.²⁰³ This would explain the presence of the family emblem above *St. Augustine*: if the frescoes were perceived as belonging to the same work, rather than two separate ones, having the family coat of arms displayed above both saints would have been superfluous. The collaboration of different artists on the same project was not unusual practice: described by Even Yael as 'temporary joint ventures', these associations fostered collaborations among artists who worked together in a "workshop" provided by the patron.²⁰⁴ Although I propose to identify the Vespucci as those in charge of commissioning the *tramezzo* decoration, the frescoes must be also considered the result of the collaboration and agreement between the family and the Humiliati order. The nature and meaning of the images would have in fact suited both parts, allowing them to identify themselves with the spiritual and humanistic meanings of the Church Fathers and, perhaps, showing adherence to fifteenth-century Neoplatonic ideals.

8. Ognissanti, a cultural centre

The frescoes the Vespucci commissioned for their private chapel and the *tramezzo* of Ognissanti, would have had a powerful impact on the visitors to the church. Who would have seen these frescoes and what message were they meant to convey? As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Unicorno, considered a marginal area of Florence, has attracted little scholarly attention. My investigation, however, shows that in the second half of the fifteenth century this was not a minor part of the city but, rather, a cultural one: the Vespucci artistic commissions and rights of patronage in Ognissanti, should in fact be perceived as the first of a series of

²⁰³ For the use of coat of arms as a signature of patronage and power see: BROGAN 1993, XVI.

²⁰⁴ Yael 1984, 1-14. Among fifteenth-century Florentine temporary joint ventures there was the Cardinal of Portugal chapel in San Miniato. This was the result of the collaboration of several artists: Antonio Rossellino, Alesso Baldovinetti, Luca della Robbia, Piero di Lorenzo, and the Pollaiuolo brothers, WRIGHT 2005, 193.

initiatives that the Vespucci strategically adopted to affirm the family's power and prestige inside and outside of the *gonfalone*.

In 1476, when the Vespucci had already acquired the patronage rights for the three family chapels and when the decoration of the *Cappella della Misericordia* was in place, Ognissanti became the stage for theatrical performances carried out in the Carnival season. Attended by prominent citizens, the comedy *Licinia* by Pietro Domizi and a play by Terence were performed before Lorenzo il Magnifico in 1476 and 1478 by the students of Pietro Domizi, *magistro* at Santa Maria del Fiore.²⁰⁵ The letters sent by Domizi to il Magnifico do not provide evidence of Vespucci involvement in these theatrical activities, though the fact that Giorgio Antonio had his students performing Terence's *Andria* in the Medici palace in 1476, is perhaps significant. It not only proves that the Vespucci were associates of the Medici household in the 1470s, but also the involvement of a member of the Vespucci family in the revival of classical plays: with the staging of Terence and Domizi's plays, Florence became the first venue for the performance of classical comedies in the Renaissance.²⁰⁶ This must have been perceived as something innovative and certainly different from the traditional *sacre rappresentazioni*, the form of devotional drama celebrated since the fourteenth century across the city. Notable were those organised in Oltrarno, not too far from Ognissanti. Plays of the Ascension were celebrated yearly in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine while those of the Pentecost were staged in Santo Spirito.²⁰⁷

Other innovations were taking place in the area around Ognissanti. In October 1477, the humanist Angelo Poliziano, at the time canon of Santa Maria del Fiore, was appointed prior of San Paolino by Lorenzo il Magnifico.²⁰⁸ Located behind the Vespucci properties, the church of San Paolino stood in via della Scala, along

²⁰⁵ PLAISANCE AND CAREW-REID 2008, 32. On Pietro Domizi and his teaching activity at Florence's cathedral: PROCACCIOLI 1991, available online: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/domizi-del-comandatore-pietro_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/domizi-del-comandatore-pietro_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

²⁰⁶ BLACK 2007, 164.

²⁰⁷ For the *sacre rappresentazioni* in fifteenth-century Florence: NEWBIGIN 1996, VOL 1, 45-155, 157-208. NEWBIGIN 2007, 139-155.

²⁰⁸ DEL LUNGO 1897, 193; O' MALLEY 2010, 14.

which other two important centres developed. The first was the hospital of San Martino alla Scala where Botticelli, in the 1480s, frescoed the *Annunciation* today at the Uffizi Gallery.²⁰⁹ The second was the printing press of San Jacopo di Ripoli, an important centre for the production of printed books positioned near the hospital of San Martino. Active between 1476-1483, the press was a prolific centre and its customers included members from the elite families of Florence such as the Aldobrandini, Cocchi, Gondi, Gucci, and Rucellai who purchased or received as gifts some of the religious and secular books produced by the press.²¹⁰ Among the books printed there, it featured works by classical authors such as Plato and Statius, but also writings of contemporary Florentines such as Ficino and Poliziano, and religious books such as St. Augustine's *Logica* printed in 1480.²¹¹ The *Logica*, printed at the same time as the realisation of Botticelli's *St. Augustine*, establishes an interesting connection between the activity of the press and Ognissanti.

In this way, the cultural context of the *gonfalone* Unicornio permits us to locate the Vespucci's commission for the *tramezzo* of Ognissanti and the *Cappella della Misericordia* in a wider context that goes beyond the sacral space of the church and, even, the boundaries of the *gonfalone*. Despite the presence of textile workers, families of merchants and notaries like the Bencini-Baldesi, Sassetti and Lenzi, were also dwelling in the Unicornio by the 1470s.²¹² The frescoes of the Vespucci chapel and the *tramezzo*, in line with the religious and intellectual interests of the Humiliati, were, on one hand, addressed to these families who would have recognised the spiritual and humanistic meanings conveyed by St. Jerome and St. Augustine, while this would have not happened for the poorest

²⁰⁹ Few studies exist on the hospital. For Botticelli's *Annunciation* (1481, detached fresco, 243 x 555 cm. Florence, Uffizi) and its display in San Martino alla Scala: PAOLINI et.al. 2010, 180.

²¹⁰ On the Ripoli Press and its relationship with other earlier Florentine printing and publishing enterprises: PETTAS 1980, 1-18; CONWAY 1999, 9-17; GRAY 2012, 54-175; NUOVO 2013, 315-320.

²¹¹ NESI 1903, 44; CONWAY 1999, 69 n. 14.

²¹² An in-depth analysis of the Unicornio and its households was beyond the scope of this chapter. Considerations were therefore based on the information retrieved in relation to the Vespucci and on the data provided by existing studies of the families of Florence: CIABANI 1992, 625-627; PREYER 2008, 6-17.

groups.²¹³ On the other hand, the frescoes commissioned by the family were also meant to be viewed by the Medici and their entourage who lived in the *gonfalone* Unicornio and entered the church of Ognissanti during the theatrical performances. If it is true, as the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu discussed, that individuals define themselves in terms of what they share in common and in terms of their differentiation from others, in Ognissanti the Vespucci displayed images and produced meaning according to the aesthetic and cultural dispositions of the social class with which they identified themselves, enlarging the gap with those they wished to distinguish themselves from.²¹⁴

The *Cappella della Misericordia*, with allusions to northern European art, the *St. Jerome*, inspired by a similar painting in the Medici collection, and the showy materialism of the *tramezzo* frescoes, reflected the Vespucci's artistic taste, clearly in line with that of the patrician class. This also showed the family's awareness of the leading role Florence had in the production, circulation, and consumption of luxury goods, actively promoted, as the case of the spectacles demonstrated, by the Medici. The representation of the *studioli*, the depiction of books, and the presence of the Greek and Hebrew scrolls, are to be interpreted as overt links to fifteenth-century Florentine culture and humanism, an attempt to prove the Vespucci intellectuals equal to the Medici and the humanists who gathered around this household. The Vespucci's commissions in Ognissanti were aimed at flattering the Medici and impressing the wealthy class, must therefore be seen as a public statement aiming to be viewed by a wide audience and intended to display the family's prestige, wealth, and culture.

The Vespucci's artistic patronage in Ognissanti was part of a larger project the family was undertaking in the church and, more broadly, in the *gonfalone* Unicornio. The Vespucci, in fact, could have perhaps been responsible for having theatrical performances organised in Ognissanti, promoting the church as a cultural

²¹³ FREEDBERG 1989, 8-9 and 161-191. The identification of the viewer in the scene has also been investigated in relation to the frescoes of the Brancacci chapel: RUBIN 2007, 98.

²¹⁴ BOURDIEU 1984, 56-57.

centre. The Vespucci made use of the connections they had established with wealthy families of Florence through their political, religious, mercantile, and cultural activities, and attracted the ruling class to the family hub, presenting their 'marginal' area as a renovated space. Renovation encompassed several aspects: spiritual, through the election of Ognissanti as the family church; mercantile, through the creation of the Vespucci family's company and the use of the nearby mills; and cultural through the decoration and performances of Ognissanti. Along the same lines the presence of the Ripoli printing press should also be interpreted, although no direct connection with the Vespucci family can be established. Lorenzo de' Medici's appointment of Poliziano as prior of San Paolino in 1477, however, is unlikely to have been a mere coincidence and must be seen as the result of the importance the Unicorno was acquiring through the Vespucci. Aiming at shaping family identity, the Vespucci cleverly commissioned images and organised activities that affirmed the family while balancing the spiritual and cultural interests of the Humiliati and the expectations of the elite class. In the years between 1470-1480, a crucial decade for the Vespucci's social rise, the move of their liminal living area towards the Medici, centre of the city's power, and the self-promotion of the family through Ognissanti commissions, is indicative of the family's social aspirations and of the influence it had acquired by then.

The analysis of Vespucci patronage within Ognissanti has shown the close relationship between the three family branches in the period of 1470-1480. Rather than pursuing individual benefits, members belonging to different lines strictly interacted with each other both on personal and social levels. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, wills show that money, properties, and personal belongings were handed down to male agnates and, if none existed, they were bequeathed to members of the other lines. Archival documents also attest that lands in the *contado* were sold between various family members who also reciprocally stood one for the other as witness or *procuratori* of legal causes. The same sense of family

belonging and ownership is revealed in Ognissanti, with the emblematic example of Bice Vespucci who endowed money to furnish the altar of a different branch. The three Vespucci chapels in Ognissanti, rather than singled out individually, should therefore be considered in strict relation to one another as the result of family collaboration. By erecting three chapels and commissioning the frescoes for the *tramezzo*, on which the family coat of arms was prominently displayed, the Vespucci 'took over' Ognissanti, stressing their presence in the neighbourhood's spiritual hub.

The Vespucci's artistic commissions were only one part of a larger project the Vespucci were undertaking in the *gonfalone* Unicornio in the 1470-1480, that saw the family marking its presence and power inside and outside of the district. As Michelle O'Malley suggests, given that neighbourhoods were the 'principal arenas for establishing bonds of social, business, and political supports', the Vespucci, reflecting the prestige they had acquired through public offices and cultural engagements, positioned themselves as power brokers within their living area.²¹⁵ The family stressed its presence within the *gonfalone* Unicornio in many ways: through their mercantile activity in the textile industry along the Arno; through the presence of the family hospital in Borgo Ognissanti; through their cultural activities in Ognissanti; and through the commission of innovative artworks not only for their chapels, but also for their private house, as the following chapter will discuss. The predominant position of the Vespucci within the area would have not only been perceived by the inhabitants of the *gonfalone*, but also by the members of Florence's elite who the Vespucci strategically attracted within the *gonfalone* by transforming Ognissanti into an up-to-date cultural centre. Ognissanti served the Vespucci as a family 'stage', showing them as cultural leaders and trendsetters: not only the Vespucci were involved in the first theatrical representations of classical comedies ever seen in Florence, but they were also the first Florentine family to employ the artist Ghirlandaio for the decoration of their private chapel.

²¹⁵ O' MALLEY 2010, 15.

In the *Cappella della Misericordia*, the Vespucci opted for a decoration that depended on northern European examples, such as those circulating in Italy and Florence at the time. Rather than a mere reflection of a collective family's artistic taste, the overt inclination shown towards Flemish painting should be evaluated for its social implications. By choosing to make clear references to northern models the Vespucci aimed to place themselves among Florence's elite who, around 1470-80, 'used' northern European art not only for devotional purposes, but also as a means for fashioning themselves and confirming their social position within a specific group of citizens. Florentine patrons who commissioned and bought northern art in the period 1470-1480 were in fact connected to the Medici. Similarly, the *tramezzo* decoration, with the representation of *studioli* enriched with luxurious contemporary objects and humanistic references, reflected the Vespucci's artistic taste and cultural attitude, both in line with those of the wealthy families of Florence.

The behavioural pattern of the Vespucci, as emerged in the considerations outlined in this chapter, shows parallels with the *modus operandi* of the insects they identified themselves with, the wasps. Just like social wasps, which exist in colonies working together to build nests, the Vespucci teamed together to emerge, establish themselves and forge their identity within Florence. Like wasps fly around, searching for nutrients, the Vespucci strategically moved across Florence. Entering the same networks, family members found their source of nourishment in the Medici and their entourage who they tried to impress by making use of their local power.

CHAPTER 4

Botticelli's *Mars and Venus*: A case study

The elite families of fifteenth-century Florence displayed their wealth, status, and culture not only by decorating private chapels in the city's churches, but also through the acquisition of lavish goods for display in their private houses. Births and marriages, in particular, provided occasions to commission a wide range of objects to adorn couples's bedrooms.¹ It is in the second half of the 1470s, alongside the decoration of Ognissanti, that I propose to date one of the Vespucci's wedding commissions: Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* (Figure 85). It was the art historian Ernst Gombrich who first associated this painting with a Vespucci wedding, considering the panel part of a *cassone*, or wedding chest, and interpreting the presence of flying wasps around Mars's head (Figure 86) as a punning reference to the family's coat of arms.² Since Gombrich's hypothesis was published, the Vespucci connection has been repeated, although his statement has never been scrutinised and the connection with the Vespucci family never confirmed.³ The purpose of this study is to discuss *Mars and Venus* in light of the Vespucci history and artistic patronage, and to expand the current knowledge of the panel by adding three fundamental elements to its history: the year of execution, the occasion of its commission, and the identity of the patron. Visual and archival evidence will allow me to establish a secure connection between the Vespucci and the painting for the first time, and - building upon the considerations made in Chapter 3 - promote further discussion of the Vespucci's innovative artistic choices in the 1470s.

Many hypotheses have been advanced over the years on the meaning of *Mars and Venus*, the occasion of its commission, its purpose, and the date of

¹ AJMAR-WOLLHEIM and DENNIS 2006, 104-135.

² GOMBRICH 1972, 68.

³ A different hypothesis was expressed by Lightbown who reckoned that the wasps were a joking illustration rather than a punning allusion to the Vespucci: LIGHTBOWN 1989, 165.

execution. At present none of these aspects have been unanimously accepted by scholars: the execution of the painting dates variously between 1476 and 1485; and the nature of the panel as part of a *cassone* has been questioned. The problematic aspect related to the identity of the sitters has also divided scholarly opinion: while some argued that *Mars and Venus* could allude to Simonetta Vespucci and her lover Giuliano de' Medici, others discussed the impossibility of seeing portraits in the generalised features of the two gods.⁴ Another difficult aspect to pinpoint was the meaning of the painting and its sources. Literary passages from Lucretius, Poliziano, Ficino, and Resposianus were adduced as possible sources of inspiration for Botticelli and several interpretations were proposed for the panel. The most recurrent is the one that sees *Mars and Venus* as an allegory of Love being more powerful than Strife: the awake Venus, goddess of Love, stares at a sleeping, defeated Mars, god of war, whose arms are reduced to toys for infant satyrs.⁵ The complexity of *Mars and Venus* urged a plurality of approaches that resulted in a multilayered interpretation that was at once allegorical, anagogical - concerned with Neoplatonic-Christian meanings - moral, and satiric. All that has been said about *Mars and Venus* remains scattered in the several contributions published on Botticelli and despite the interest the panel arouses, it did not receive as much attention as other works such as *The Primavera* or *The Birth of Venus* that continue to offer a fertile ground for investigation.⁶

Several aspects will be taken into consideration in order to offer a complete and precise reconsideration of *Mars and Venus*. Attention will initially turn to the flying wasps positioned on the top right corner of the panel in order to understand in what ways they can be connected to the Vespucci family. The examination of the painting's material culture and its botanical aspects will offer evidence to support

⁴ For those who believed that Venus portraits Simonetta Vespucci: SUPINO 1900, 31; MESNIL 1938, 55; BARFUCCI and BECHERUCCI 1964, 108-110; SCHMITTER 1995, 33-57; VENTRONE 2007, 7-49; PACINI 2011, 58-85; LUCHS 2012, 86-91; For those who were against a possible identification of Simonetta with Venus: HORNE 1980, 140-142; SCHMITTER 1995, 33.

⁵ For the meaning of *Mars and Venus*: GOMBRICH 1972, 66-69; ETLINGER 1976, 138-139; BAROLSKY 1978, 209; ZUFFI 2001, 61-63; AUTIN GRAZ 2002, 40; RUVOLDT 2004, 37-38; DEMPSEY 2012, 85

⁶ For the most recent publications on *The Birth of Venus*: LONG 2008, 1-27; BAROLSKY 2013, 4-5. For *The Primavera*: ANDREWS 2011, 73-84; BURROUGHS 2012, 71-83; PONCET 2012, 9-109; DEE 2013, 4-33.

the hypothesis of the panel being a marriage piece, commissioned to decorate a nuptial bedroom, and centred on the idea of conjugal and physical love. Although previous studies have stressed the impossibility of associating any of the Vespucci weddings to *Mars and Venus*, a careful analysis of the genealogical trees discussed in Chapter 1 will demonstrate otherwise. The marriage identified will suggest a new date for the execution of the painting, and the name of the patron who commissioned it. The last part of this study will look at the meaning of, and sources for, the panel; and will revise past hypotheses in light of the new evidence gathered. By re-considering *Mars and Venus* from several angles, this chapter will overcome past assumptions by offering a comprehensive and multi-layered examination of the panel and formulate new hypotheses based on visual, textual, and archival evidence.

1. The ‘conspicuous and puzzling motif of wasps’

The point of departure for the study of the commission history of Botticelli’s *Mars and Venus* are the small insects buzzing around Mars’s head (Figure 86). While Gombrich connected the ‘conspicuous and puzzling motif of wasps’ to the Vespucci, other scholars, while stressing the Vespucci connection with the painting, have paid less attention in using a consistent definition, variously referring to the insects as ‘wasps’ and ‘bees’.⁷ As seen in Chapter 1, in fifteenth-century Florence black and yellow striped flying insects were linked exclusively to the Vespucci and the family’s emblem. Although the visual material available makes it difficult to discern any real features of the insects represented, the notable presence of waspy-like symbols inside and outside of Florence in connection to the Vespucci further the assumption that the symbols are meant to be wasps, an overt allusion to the family name. As I shall discuss, the precise rendering of the insects in Botticelli’s *Mars and Venus* confirms this hypothesis.

⁷ The definition of the insects as ‘bees’ is used in: CHENEY 1985, 58; LETHBRIDGE 2003, 236; BASTA 2005, 130. Mention of bees appears also in Simone REINHARDT’s *Sandro Botticelli’s Mars und Venus in London* (Master Thesis, Bonn University. 2002). I am grateful to Caroline Campbell for having shared information related to Reinhardt’s dissertation with me.

In 1946 the identification of Botticelli's insects provoked the curiosity of Martin Davies, Director of the National Gallery of London. Among the papers contained in the 'Mars and Venus' folder in the Gallery's Archive there is an unpublished letter that Robert Benson, Assistant Keeper in the Department of Entomology at the British Museum, sent as a reply to Martin Davies. Benson stated that the insects depicted were, in fact, intended to be wasps, most probably representatives of the genus *Polybie*, although the form of the nest suggested some confusion with the genus *Vespa*.⁸ No further investigation to identify the insects depicted seems to have ever been attempted. I have therefore approached a group of entomologists in order to undertake a scientific analysis of Botticelli's insects. The visual examination of the panel's top right corner permitted entomologists from London, Italy, and Brussels to confirm that the insects depicted were wasps, and to identify them with the genus *Polystes*.⁹ The hypothesis of Botticelli's wasps being part of the genus *Polystes* rather than *Polybie*, as proposed by Benson, seems a compelling one. While the former group can be traced in the Italian peninsula, the latter is spread in South America. Botticelli, however, would have not had the chance to represent wasps belonging to the New World. The possibility of recognising the type of wasps depicted by Botticelli suggests the meticulous attention the artist paid to the representation of naturalistic details. Botticelli's skill in carefully representing plants and flowers has already been highlighted as a prerogative of the artists's style: the botanical studies of Mirella Levi d'Ancona and

⁸ 'Dear Sir, in reply to your letter of 25 IX 1946, the insects depicted in the photograph of part of a Botticelli are certainly intended to be wasps, most probably representatives of the genus *Polybie*, though the form of the nest suggests some confusion with the social wasps of the genus *Vespa*; in either case however the colour pattern and structure are not very accurate and are not probably intended to be. One peculiarity is that the nest that is attached to the bough of the tree has its opening at the side, whereas the opening of wasps's nests is always underneath and I should have thought any artists would have observed that. Has it then had its side knocked off? I have consulted with our librarian Mr. A.C Townsend and after some research we have not been able to confirm that wasps had any symbolic meaning or connection with Mars or Venus. Yours truly. Robert B. Benson Assistant Keeper, Hymenoptera', Letter sent to Martin Davies Esq., NG, Trafalgar Square, London on 2nd October 1946, NGL Archive, *Mars and Venus* folder. I thank Nicholas Donaldson for having helped me accessing the documentation of the National Gallery Archive.

⁹ I am particularly thankful to Dr. Rinaldo Nicoli Aldini from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Piacenza; Andrew Polaszek from the Natural History Museum of London; Marco Accorti; Renzo Barbattini from the Università degli Studi of Udine; Massimo Ghirardi from the Gruppo Italiano di Araldica Civica; and Jean-Luc Renneson from The Royal Institute of Natural Science of Belgium.

Maria Adele Signorini were aimed at identifying the plants and flowers depicted in *The Primavera* in order to correctly interpret the symbolism of the painting.¹⁰

The wasps depicted in *Mars and Venus* must be considered a punning allusion to the Vespucci family and its emblem. The fact that Botticelli's wasps feature as a 'narrative' aspect of the panel, rather than being included in a shield-like coat of arms, does not diminish their heraldic value. As discussed by Lucia Borgia and Francesca Fumi, the Quattrocento witnessed the emergence of the so-called 'araldica disarticolata', or disjointed heraldry, a visual practice that sought to extract the heraldic elements from the boundaries of the shield and place them freely within a narrative context.¹¹ In the case of the Medici, for instance, the family adopted red *palle* as one of the visual devices of self-identification: displayed on artistic commissions, the *palle* became a symbol of patronage and a 'signature of power'.¹² Among the many ways in which this heraldic device was used, the 'freed heraldry' can be seen in the Medicean manuscript Plut. 53.2 of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. The miniature at *folio* 5r. presents a group of fauns playing with red balls surrounded by laurel bushes. Here the Medici symbol is taken out of its original context and, while maintaining its symbolic meaning, it becomes part of the narrative of the miniature (Figure 87).¹³

If viewed in this way, the wasps represented in *Mars and Venus* could also be interpreted as the disjointed heraldic device of the Vespucci family. A similar

¹⁰ LEVI D'ANCONA 1983, 9-21; SIGNORINI 2010, 153-175.

¹¹ BORGIA and FUMI CAMBI GADO 1992, 225-235

¹² Apart from the well-known *palle*, members of the Medici family variously identified themselves through the use of the diamond ring, the laurel, and lions (the latter probably a civic emblem employed by the Medici to express their power within the city). For an overview of the Medici symbols and their employment see: AMES-LEWIS 1979, 126, 131, 134, 140. For a discussion of the 'signature of power' through heraldic devices with specific references to the Medici family: BROGAN 1993, 71-142.

¹³ Visual examples of the Medici *palle* displayed according to the theory of the *araldica disarticolata* can be found in: BORGIA and FUMI CAMBI GADO 1992, 225-235. I think that it is possible to talk of 'disjointed heraldry' also in relation to the real and fictive architectures that characterise some artistic commissions of the Medici family. In Filippo Lippi's *Madonna and Child with Sts. Francis, Damian, Cosmas, and Anthony of Padua* (Florence, Uffizi), the Virgin, the Child, and the Saints are framed by a fictive architecture that displays the Medici *palle*. The same decorative frieze motif generated out of the Medici coat of arms was adopted by Michelozzo in the convent church at Bosco ai Frati: HOLMES 1999, 194-195.

example could be found in the Waldseemüller Map: a small wasp features next to Amerigo the explorer in the centre of the composition (Figure 88). Although not included in a narrative context as those represented in *Mars and Venus* are, the wasp on the Waldseemüller Map acts as a visual device for the identification of the figure represented, proving the strict relationship that existed between the Vespucci and those insects.¹⁴

2. Exploring wedding material culture in *Mars and Venus*

The cryptic meaning and unusual composition of *Mars and Venus* have fascinated generations of art historians. Uncertain and highly debated is the meaning and derivation of its theme. Several different hypotheses have been put forward, as I will discuss in detail later. While the source of the painting is still a much debated question, scholars have agreed that the panel centres on the idea of love. General consensus has identified the two reclining figures as *Venus*, goddess of Love, and *Mars*, god of war, the latter recognisable for his attributes - the helmet, the sword, and the lance.¹⁵ The presence of Venus and Mars, the myrtle in the background, and the three satyrs, have been highlighted as the elements that make the panel fall into the group of painted furniture commissioned for a wedding and meant to be displayed in a bedchamber.¹⁶ Over the years art historians have exclusively and repeatedly taken these factors into consideration, whilst leaving others unexplored. Building upon past studies, the present section aims to further investigate aspects of material culture and bodily display in order to provide a full examination of the panel's love and wedding related elements. In the specifically, attention will turn to the white dress Venus is wearing, her hair, the chest brooch, and the cushion the goddess is leaning on. Other aspects of enquiry will be the symbolic meaning of the lance, the shell, the helmet, the sword, and the green fruit depicted on the bottom

¹⁴ Ariel Castro speculated on the possibility of the insect represented on the Waldseemüller Map being a fly rather than a wasp. On the basis of the evidence gathered I disagree with this hypothesis, CASTRO 2008, 20-23.

¹⁵ ZÖLLNER 1998, 18-19.

¹⁶ GAMBA 1936, 154-55; MESNIL 1938, 54-66; LIGHTBOWN 1978, 164-70; ZÖLLNER 2005, 124-30.

right corner of the panel. Do these elements refer to love and marriage? What idea would have they conveyed to a fifteenth-century viewer?

While today it is normal to think of bridal dresses as being white, such a straightforward association cannot be established when dealing with the Renaissance. Despite the several studies carried out on Renaissance weddings, only a few provide information on outfits, leaving bridal dresses a problematic aspect to pin down.¹⁷ It is difficult to ascertain whether it was a familiar custom for Florentine brides to wear white dresses on their wedding day. The account written in 1475 for the wedding of Costanzo Sforza and Camilla Marzano d'Aragona, and recently translated by Jane Bridgeman, records the use of white dresses for the celebration carried out in the day prior to the wedding.¹⁸ According to the source the couple was dressed in costly white silk woven with real gold threads. No insight, however, is offered into the colour of the bridal dresses. Most fifteenth-century visual culture connected to weddings represent scenes taken from classical episodes where women are the focus of attention, but are rarely brides. There are some in which a wedding procession or a banquet is depicted, but they make it difficult to establish whether a 'dress code' for brides existed: brides appear in white dresses, but also in red and gold robes, often decorated with elaborate brocades. Among fifteenth-century wedding depictions, Botticelli's *Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* (Figure 89) and Domenico Morone's *Rape of the Sabine Women* (Figure 90) present brides wearing white dresses. Charles Dempsey suggested that Venus's costume was derived from a *camicia da giorno*, but rather than being a contemporary dress, it was a theatrical one. According to the author, similar dresses are also worn by the majority of Botticelli's female figures such as those in *The Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus*.¹⁹ A certain level of idealisation is certainly detectable in Botticelli's works and in Venus's dress: made up with thin translucent layers of white fabric, the dress recalls the long white tunics of antiquity. However, the presence of the chest

¹⁷ Among the studies that deal with art, love, and wedding without offering information on the colour of bridal dresses: RANDOLPH 1998, 182-200; ALLERSTON 1998, 30-31; DEAN and LOWE 1998, 1-21; MUSACCHIO 1998, 70; FRICK 2002, 115-132; D'ELIA 2004, 1-9; MUSACCHIO 2008, 5, 31, 33-37, 182.

¹⁸ BRIDGEMAN 2013, 49.

¹⁹ DEMPSEY 2001, 203-204.

brooch is a fundamental element that suggests Venus's costume is, if not a bridal dress, at least an allusion to one.

Chest brooches seem to have been a specific feature of wedding outfits. Generally called *fermagli*, brooches were functional and decorative devices either used to fasten cloaks or worn as ornaments on ladies's heads or shoulders.²⁰ Combining pendants, pearls and precious stones, brooches became a fundamental part of the material exchanges constituting marriage.²¹ They were part of the counter-dowry offered by the groom to the bride's family: the *donora* included body ornaments, sumptuous clothes and jewels, such as shoulder brooches, head brooches, and pendants.²² It is possible to find relevant information about jewels and brooches in fifteenth-century *ricordanze*, private diaries and account books written by men in which all the expenditure encountered, wedding included, were listed.²³ Marco Parenti recorded having bought the wedding gown of his future wife as well as a gold brooch set with two sapphires and three pearls; Bartolomeo di Tommaso Sassetti listed the gifts made to his bride, among which he noted a brooch estimated to cost one florin; and Giovanni di Domenico Buoninsegni similarly noted that among the jewels given to his wife there was a gold brooch with four large pearls.²⁴ *Ricordanze* are not the only written sources to confirm the function of brooches in marking the bridal body. A sumptuary law of 1472 stated that women could wear necklaces, veils and two brooches for three years from the day that they married. The same also applied to those who had already married, as to those who were about to. After the wedding, they could wear a necklace and only one brooch for another three years, after which period they were entirely forbidden to bear any of these things.²⁵

²⁰ HERALD 1981, 176.

²¹ Pearls, in particular, were praised for their virtue: JONGH 1976, 69-97.

²² RANDOLPH 1998, 187; RANDOLPH, 2008, 15-30.

²³ MARTELLI 1989, 24-8.

²⁴ For the steps the groom had to go through to commission the dress and jewels of his future bride: FRICK 2002, 125-27; RANDOLPH 1998, 187.

²⁵ RANDOLPH 1998, 189.

The use of brooches and jewels is witnessed not only in written documents, but also in visual representations. Portraits by Pollaiuolo, Filippo Lippi, and Botticelli, often represent ladies wearing chest and head brooches, pendants and rings. In his article on bridal body display, Adrian Randolph suggested a link between the jewels represented in paintings and the marriage jewels mentioned in private diaries.²⁶ The author pointed out that in Piero di Cosimo's altarpiece for the Ospedale degli Innocenti, representing the Madonna and Child with angels and saints, St. Catherine is identified as the *sponsa Christi* as she holds out a ring referring to her spiritual betrothal to Christ. She is here depicted wearing head and shoulder brooches (Figure 91). According to Randolph, the symbolic use of jewels by Piero di Cosimo, together with their presence in private *ricordanze*, establishes a link between textual and visual evidence. It may also be noted that brooches are associated with the Virgin in several Renaissance paintings: Ghirlandaio, Botticelli, and Leonardo, often depicted oval brooches on the Virgin's chest as devices and ornaments to fasten the cloak. The Virgin, just like St. Catherine, was a *sponsa*, as confirmed in those paintings that represent the *Marriage of the Virgin*.

Another painting that seems to confirm the use of brooches in connection with weddings is Botticelli's *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* (Figure 89). In the third and fourth episodes the bride is dressed like Venus of *Mars and Venus*: not only she is wearing a chest brooch but she is also dressed in white. A similar look is also adopted by Botticelli in *The Primavera* for the three Graces: one of them carries a big chest brooch (Figure 92). The Greek poet Homer said that one of the Graces, Charis, was married to Hephaestus, so that a connection between Grace, the white dress and the chest brooch might be hypothesised.²⁷ The brooches in Botticelli's paintings are similar to one another: a central round element, perhaps a gemstone, is surrounded by what looks like small circular pearls. This is particularly evident in the brooch that Venus and the bride in the *Nastagio degli Onesti* panel are wearing. Although the depiction of brooches was not a peculiar element of fifteenth-century

²⁶ RANDOLPH 1998, 189.

²⁷ SMITH 1867, 228.

paintings, striking similarities between those depicted by Florentine artists seem to exist. The presence of brooches in religious paintings can be traced back to the Medieval period when they seem to have been represented as golden decorations. They continued to be painted throughout the Renaissance but they seem to have assumed a peculiar form in the fifteenth century. Round or oval brooches surrounded by pearls appear in the works of Verrocchio (Figure 93) and Leonardo da Vinci (Figure 94). Brooches similar to the ones found in Renaissance paintings also feature in the miniatures of fifteenth-century Florentine manuscripts. Normally included in the marginal decoration of illustrated pages, they appear hung up on garlands or next to medals *all'antica*, which tend to suggest the decorative use of these objects as well as their artistic and economic value.²⁸ The presence of this type of brooch in the works of Florentine artists suggests that this particular ornament's shape and style was not a mere artistic invention but, instead, a common design adopted in Quattrocento Florence.²⁹

Just as the brooch would have allowed contemporary viewers to establish a connection with the jewels produced by the city's goldsmiths, Venus's hair would have reminded them of the modern hairstyles adopted by Florentine women during the fifteenth century.³⁰ The particular feature of Venus, represented with long and loose blonde hair, is the presence of two braids that fall on her breast, becoming a decorative element of the dress the goddess is wearing. Charles Dempsey has recognised in this curious element the so-called *posticci*, false hair that ladies wore on their heads. The author found them mentioned in Luigi Pulci's *Le Galee per Quaracchi*. Written around 1471, the poem listed the cosmetics, jewelry, dresses, and adornments that ladies intended to bring with them for a weekend at Bernardo Rucellai's villa at Quaracchi, situated on the banks of the Arno not far from the city

²⁸ For examples of miniatures where brooches appear as part of the decorative apparatus: LENZUNI 1992, 70.

²⁹ Luba Freedman pointed out that fifteenth-century artists employed outside of Florence, such as Cosmè Tura, Mantegna and Bergognone, do not appear to have included brooches in Marian devotional images. In their paintings, in fact, the Virgin is normally represented wearing a plain robe: FREEDMAN, 1999, 139-154.

³⁰ For the importance of hair as a symbol of individual and group identity: WELCH 2008, 241-268.

walls.³¹ Also Rosita Levi Pisetzky mentioned the use of *posticci* in her study of Quattrocento haircare and clothing. Often referred to as *mazzocchi*, *posticci* came in different sizes and shapes and their application to one's hair was a common practice adopted by ladies in the fifteenth century.³²

Besides the dress and the brooch, written and visual proofs also exist for the cushion Venus is leaning on. Cushions are mentioned in private diaries in relation to weddings: they seem to have frequently been part of the dowry given by the bride's father and carried in wedding chests during the *domumductio* together with towels, pillowcases, sheets, and tablecloths. As the dowry aimed to flaunt the generosity of the bride's family, objects were finely decorated: cushions, for instance, were covered with expensive silk often enhanced with metal threads as a surviving example shows (Figure 95). The presence of silk cushions in Renaissance houses is confirmed by the surviving descriptions of dowries and wardrobes.³³ Elisabetta Gonzaga of Montefeltro's wedding trousseau included cushions of crimson satin with a network of gold and silver; Lucrezia Borgia's wardrobe contained two cushions of green velvet with tassels and lace of gold; and Chiara Sforza's dowry included a large number of domestic furnishings such as mattresses and cushions.³⁴ The description of silk cushions embellished with golden decoration seems to find a visual proof in *Mars and Venus* where a red cushion is enriched with golden threads joined in a floral pattern (Figure 96). Decorative attention and display intentions have also been noticed in relation to pillows. Although different from cushions in terminology and purpose, some pillows seem to have been embroidered for display. Created by employing rich materials and fine workmanship, pillows were placed at the foot of the bed on special occasions.³⁵

³¹ DEMPSEY 2012, 95-97.

³² LEVI PISETZKY 1964, 289.

³³ Guido Biagi took into account the *ricordanze* of the Minerbetti family. Listed among the various domestic objects featured some *guanciali* enriched with golden threads: BIAGI 1899, 18.

³⁴ AJMAR-WOLLHEIM and DENNIS 2006, 342-351.

³⁵ THORNTON 1991, 167. For the importance of weddings as social events and opportunities to display lavish material goods: ALLERSTON 1998, 25-40.

Attention must also be drawn to the use of visual devices as bearers of sexual allusions. The three satyrs are holding a lance that ends inside a shell (Figure 97). In the Renaissance the lance was associated with the male sexual organ while the shell with the female one. Such associations rested on a long tradition, as similar connections had previously been employed by Greek and Latin authors. In his study of the use of obscene language in Attic comedy, Jeffrey Henderson showed that while weapons and elongated objects were used as metaphors for the male sexual organ, the seashell was often employed to indicate the female body cavity.³⁶ Examples of the use of the lance as a sexual metaphor were later expressed in literary writings of Renaissance humanists such as Boccaccio, Pietro Aretino, and Ludovico Ariosto. Associating masculinity with penetration and violence, these authors linked sex to violence, aggression, and war, metaphors frequently used also in carnival poetry. Veiling erotic allusions behind words such as spears, javelins, and swords, they inherited from Greek and Latin texts the practice of describing sexual encounters as battles.³⁷ Described in a cheeky and allusive way, jousts also became a metaphor of the sexual act: in the *giostra dell'anello*, for instance, the knights needed to place their lance inside a suspended ring while riding a horse.³⁸

Beyond the lance and the shell other elements of the painting that bear sexual meanings are the sword underneath Mars's hand and the satyrs, symbol of physical love.³⁹ Although represented as babies, the three satyrs retain their conventional meaning: conceived as half man, half beast, with pointed ears and goat legs, satyrs were associated with the god Dionysus and seen as the incarnation

³⁶ HENDERSON 1991, 30-142; SIMONS 2011, 112-113.

³⁷ BOGGIONE and CASALEGNO 1996, 245, 246, 248; SIMONS 2011, 39, 112-115. For a comparison of the male sexual organ to weapons: ADAMS 1982, 19-22. Allusion to sex through the use of metaphors was not a prerogative of literary and painted sources. Examples can also be found in musical compositions such as madrigals: MACY 1996, 1-34. For sexual metaphors in carnival songs: ROCKE 1996, 124-125.

³⁸ VENTRONE 1992b, 194-195.

³⁹ The elongated object Mars is touching with his left hand, is the cross guard of his sword. I am indebted to Stuart Ivinson of the Royal Armouries of Leeds for having confirmed the identification of this detail. The difficulty in identifying the object Mars is touching with his hand was already pointed out by Lightbown. The author argued that the cross-guard and the pommel of the sword were drawn in incorrect relation to the blade, and this produced a strange distortion: LIGHTBOWN 1978, 56.

of lust and carnality.⁴⁰ Patricia Simons convincingly discussed the erotic nature of *Mars and Venus* in light of her recent studies of men's physiological characteristics in relation to semen, testicles, and masculine heat. Taking into account the satyrs, the lance, and the shell, the author argued for the sexualised features of Botticelli's panel: the cheeky looking satyrs appear responsible for having manipulated the lance represented within the conch-shell as if it had penetrated it.

Another element worth considering is the helmet placed on the head of one of the satyrs. Reconsidering Michael Camille's analysis of Martinus Opifex's episode of Achilles and the lover in the *Historia Troiana*, Simons discussed the meaning of the helmet, broken lance, and the shield positioned on the floor next to the bed of the lovers (Figure 98). According to the author, the discarded helmet would refer to the bare penile 'head' that hits its 'target', indicated by the presence of the nearby shield.⁴¹ A similar interpretation could perhaps be attempted for *Mars and Venus*, given the helmet is off Mars's head, positioned in line with the lance and the shell-target. This finds visual evidence in the figure of Mars: as Paul Barolsky, Maria Ruvoldt and Patricia Simons already proposed, Mars's loose limbs can be considered the result of a post-coital experience that, invigorating for the woman, was exhausting for the man.⁴²

A reference to carnal love is also embodied in the green fruit positioned under the hand of the baby satyr, on the bottom right corner of the painting (Figure 99). Generally overlooked, the fruit has not attracted scholars's attention and attempts to identify its nature and explain its meaning are scant. As seen earlier, Botticelli paid careful attention to the representation of botanical aspects, and the lifelike rendering of the myrtle bushes and the buzzing wasps in *Mars and Venus* suggested that also the green fruit could be traceable in nature. But what is it? Patricia Lee Rubin and Alison Wright wondered if the fruit could have been an

⁴⁰ BAYER 2008, 220-221. On the 'monstrous' nature of the satyrs: FELTON 2012, 122-123.

⁴¹ SIMONS 2011, 39 ; CAMILLE 1998, 155.

⁴² ZUFFI 2001, 61-63; AUTIN GRAZ 2002, 40.

unripe lemon.⁴³ Upon closer inspection, however, the fruit appears small, short, and quite round, too big for a lemon or a courgette, but too oval for a squash or a melon.⁴⁴ It also does not bear the characteristic features of aubergines or cucumbers, such as those that Botticelli represented in the banquet scene of *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* (Figure 100). More recently David Bellingham linked the fruit to the *Datura stramonium*, a hypothesis rejected on the base of visual and textual analysis by Hasan Niyazi who, instead, proposed the squirting cucumber as a more likely candidate.⁴⁵

Expanding Niyazi's theory, my investigation confirmed that there is enough evidence to support the identification of Botticelli's fruit as a squirting cucumber. Produced by the wild Mediterranean plant *Ecballium elaterium*, squirting cucumbers derive their English name from their curious reaction: they vigorously squirt their seeds when touched. Small and oval, squirting cucumbers are a light yellow-green colour and have stiff hairs.⁴⁶ Visual and textual evidence suggests that these plants were known in fifteenth-century Italy. Herbals referred to the squirting cucumber with different Latin names such as *cucucmer agrestis*, *cucumber amarum*, *cuchumeris asinus* and *cucumber asininum*, the last two respectively appearing in the *Liber de Simplicibus* and *De Viribus Herbarum*.⁴⁷ The squirting cucumber was often cited in the ancient world and featured in Greek-Roman medical textbooks such as those of Hippocrates, Dioscorides, and Aulus Cornelius Celsus.⁴⁸ Printed editions of Dioscorides's *De Materia Medica* and Celsus's *De Medicina* appeared in Florence in 1478, suggesting that information about squirting cucumbers would

⁴³ RUBIN and WRIGHT 1999, 332.

⁴⁴ I am indebted to Allen Grieco for discussing the identification of the fruit with me.

⁴⁵ BELLINGHAM 2010, 347-374. NIYAZI 2010, online source available at: <http://www.3pipe.net/2010/06/misinterpreting-exploding-cucumber-for.html>. I am grateful to Jill Burke for directing my attention to this source. For the properties of the *Datura stramonium*: NIZZOLI 2003, 16.

⁴⁶ JANICK and PARIS 2006, 170.

⁴⁷ Bergamo, Biblioteca Angelo Mai, *De Viribus Herbarum*, MS 592, f. 79v. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, *Liber de Simplicibus*, Cod. Lat. VI 59, f. 214r.

⁴⁸ JANICK and PARIS and PARRISH 2007, 1141-1457.

have been accessible to Botticelli when he was executing *Mars and Venus*.⁴⁹ Both texts provided precise medical guidelines regarding the use of the *Ecballium elaterium*, which I will discuss later.

The representation of the squirting cucumber in *De Viribus Herbarum* (Figure 101) bears a striking resemblance to Botticelli's fruit. It should be noted that the stiff hairs characteristic of the squirting cucumber is not evident in Botticelli's fruit, the surface of which appears to be squamous in texture. Maria Adele Signorini has discussed how, in some instances, it is difficult to correctly identify the plants, flowers, and fruits depicted by Botticelli in his paintings.⁵⁰ According to the author, one of the reasons behind this problematic aspect is the deterioration, over time, of the painted layers of the artworks. *Mars and Venus* lacks an in-depth technical analysis and it is therefore not known if the fruit had more specific features that are no longer visible today.⁵¹

The squirting nature of the cucumber strengthens the idea of physical love already examined in relation to the lance and the shell. Patricia Simons demonstrated that fruits and vegetables were often associated with sexual intercourse, given the explicit link fifteenth-century artists and writers made between fertility and the seeds contained in products such as melons, aubergines, and cucumbers.⁵² The erotic allusion of the squirting cucumber is also stressed in the festoons in the Loggia of Cupid and Psyche of the Villa Farnesina, designed by Raphael for the wealthy Sienese banker Agostino Chigi. In a horticultural study of the cucurbits depicted in the Loggia, Giulia Caneva identified five fruits of a festoon image as the *Ecballium elaterium* (Figure 102), a hypothesis later confirmed by Jules

⁴⁹ RIDOLFI 1956, 1-14; RIDOLFI 1966, 140-151; GODMAN 1998, 216.

⁵⁰ SIGNORINI 2010, 156-157.

⁵¹ The painting has not been included in the National Gallery of London's Technical Bulletin. For the technical analysis carried out on other works by Botticelli: DUNKERTON 2006, 67-79; DUNKERTON and ROY 1996, 20-31.

⁵² SIMONS 2011, 248-250.

Janick and Harry Paris.⁵³ The squirting cucumber of the Villa Farnesina, together with the other flowers, fruits, and vegetables, were connected by Philippe Morel to the voluptuousness and fertility of nature, and associated with Priapus, the god of fertility.⁵⁴ It therefore seems logical to interpret Botticelli's squirting cucumber, alongside the baby satyrs, the lance, and the shell as an overt allusion to carnal love and marriage fertility. In all probability all these elements were intended to emphasise childbearing as the primary reasons for marriage, as I will discuss later.

3. The function and display of the panel

In his first analysis of *Mars and Venus* Gombrich suggested that the panel could have been the front part of a *cassone*, or wedding chest.⁵⁵ Normally commissioned in pairs by the groom's family, chests were carried in the wedding procession filled with the bride's dowry and wardrobe. Used to decorate the newly married couple's bedroom and together with other pieces of furniture, *cassoni* comprised of decorated panels with illustrations of scenes of Roman history and triumph, wedding processions, and banquets.⁵⁶ Showing a love-related theme, *Mars and Venus* was thought to have been the front panel of a wedding chest. The large dimensions of the painting, however, caused such hypothesis to collapse. The modern display of the panel in the National Gallery of London, in fact, proves the impossibility of *Mars and Venus* as part of a *cassone*: hung above a wedding chest, the painting appears too large to have been part of one (Figure 103).

⁵³ CANEVA 1992, 74-75, 131-132; JANICK and PARIS 2006, 170.

⁵⁴ MOREL 1985, 13-28.

⁵⁵ GOMBRICH 1972, 69.

⁵⁶ For the use of *cassoni* in relation to weddings' paraphernalia, the domestic interior, and the painted tales on the panels: WITTHOFT 1982, 43-59; SCHIAPARELLI 1983, 134-170; BASKINS 1998, 1-25; LINDOW 2005, 634-646; AJMAR-WOLLHEIM and DENNIS 2006, 104-119; MUSACCHIO 2008, 136-156; RANDOLPH, 2008, 15-30. Recent exhibitions held in Florence and London focused on the use of *cassoni*, decorative furniture, and objects commonly found in fifteenth-century Florence: *Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence: the Courtauld wedding chests* (12 February – 17 May 2009) and *Virtù d'amore. Pittura Nuziale nel Quattrocento fiorentino* (Galleria dell'Accademia Museo Horne 8 June -1 November 2010). For the terminology adopted during the Renaissance for the different typologies of house furniture: THORNTON 1984, 246-251. For an economic approach towards the high demand of house goods in fifteenth-century Florence: GOLDTHWAITE 1993, 224-243.

Having discounted the idea of *Mars and Venus* as part of a *cassone*, scholars suggested the possibility of the panel being a *spalliera*, wainscoting used to decorate Florentine houses.⁵⁷ Normally encased within wooden pilasters or entablatures, *spalliere* were attached above cupboards, beds, chests or within the middle register of wall woodwork.⁵⁸ Among the different typologies of *spalliera* to be found in fifteenth-century houses, Carlo Gamba identified *Mars and Venus* as part of a *lettuccio* or as a painting to be placed above a door, while Helen Ettlinger suggested the panel could have been the headboard of a bed.⁵⁹ The possibility of *Mars and Venus* being part of a *lettuccio* is a convincing one, as the panel could have been included in a self-standing piece of furniture. *Lettucci*, also known as throne-benches or day-beds, were long narrow benches set on platforms with high wooden backs and sides wide enough for a single person. *Lettucci* could have been included in a set, placed in the chamber with matching chests and clothes-racks, or they could be unique pieces purchased individually and installed wherever necessary. Given to newly married couples as a wedding gift, the *lettuccio* was normally placed in the *camera* and used in addition to the bed itself.⁶⁰ Dennis Geronimus speculated on the possibility of Piero di Cosimo's *Liberation of Andromeda* being originally positioned on the throne-bench today at the John and Mable Ringling Museum in Sarasota (Figure 104).⁶¹ Given the similar dimensions of Piero di Cosimo and Botticelli's panels, it cannot be excluded that a similar piece of furniture was the original destination of *Mars and Venus*.

⁵⁷ GAMBA 1936, 154-55; ETLINGER 1976, 137-144; PONS 1992, 223; ZÖLLNER 1998, 14; RUBIN and WRIGHT 1999, 332; CECCHI 2005, 226. Jacqueline Musacchio and Giovanna Lazzi refer to Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* as having been either a *cassone* or *spalliera*. LAZZI 2007, 115-116; MUSACCHIO 2008, 113. Specific reference to Botticelli and Filippino Lippi's style in their production for *cassoni* and *spalliera* paintings was analysed by Jonathan Nelson: NELSON 2010, 139-147.

⁵⁸ For explanation of the use of *spalliere* and the role that painted panels had in Renaissance Italy: BARRIAULT 1994, 2-12; MUSACCHIO 2008, 156-159.

⁵⁹ GAMBA 1936, 154-55; DAVIES 1951, 78; ETLINGER 1976, 137. Positioning paintings above doors as *sovraporte* was not an uncommon practice. Also Botticelli's *Minerva and the Centaur* was said to be hung in the antechamber above the door leading to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's bedroom, DEIMLING 2009, 72.

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the use of the *lettuccio*: SCHOTTMULLER 1921, XXI; PONS 1992, 224-25; PAOLINI 2004a, 67; AJMAR-WOLLHEIM and DENNIS 2006, 122-123.

⁶¹ GERONIMUS 2006, 109-110.

Inserted in a *lettuccio*, *Mars and Venus* would have fitted in well with the decoration of a bedroom. The presence of Venus, the myrtle in the background, and the wedding elements such as the brooch and the cushion, in fact, would have being associated by the viewers with the domestic sphere, making the painting an object reserved for private enjoyment. The presence of the satyrs and the meaning associated with the lance, the shell, the helmet, and the sword, might have moreover encouraged sexual intercourse and procreation.⁶² A similar purpose was also given to the painted lids inside the *cassoni*. Chests placed in chambers often had the inside lid decorated with reclining nude male and female figures.⁶³ Jacqueline Musacchio argued that the position of the nude figures inside the chest would have permitted them to be hidden from younger members of the family, while allowing the couple to display the images in appropriate moments. It is likely that *Mars and Venus* played a similar role, stressing the concepts of conjugal and physical love. Although less explicit than the nude *cassone* figures, the panel would have still come across as powerful and provocative through the symbolic meaning of the objects depicted.⁶⁴

The identification of *Mars and Venus* as a *spalliera* has led scholars to speculate over which Vespucci property the painting might have been displayed. Unfortunately, the panel is not documented before the nineteenth century, so the scant information on its collection history does not offer any insight into its original location. Acquired in Florence by the English collector Alexander Barker around 1850-60, *Mars and Venus* was brought to London, displayed at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1893, and acquired by the National Gallery of London at Barker's death

⁶² Musacchio records that in the sermon of 1425 San Bernardino cited Augustine's reference to painted representations of couples engaged in sexual intercourse above beds as a mean to encourage procreation, MUSACCHIO 2008, 153.

⁶³ For an overview on the use and meaning of the painted lids: MUSACCHIO 2008, 151-157.

⁶⁴ The impact that reclining nude figures depicted on fifteenth-century furniture was meant to have upon the couple could perhaps be interpreted as the antecedent of erotic and pornographic images realised over the sixteenth century such as Giulio Romano's *I Modi* or Agostino Caracci's *Lascivie*. For the spread of erotic images through printed material: FINDLEN 1993, 49-108. For the viewers' reaction in front of those images capable of arousing sexual feeling: FREEDBERG 1989, 317-344 and 345-377.

in 1874.⁶⁵ Although information on the artworks purchased by Barker can be found in his correspondence with the Tuscan *connoisseur* Angiolo Frescobaldi, the silence surrounding *Mars and Venus* makes it difficult to reconstruct the history of the panel before the 1850s.⁶⁶

Dennis Geronimus suggested that the panel was part of the decoration of the Vespucci property along via de' Servi, a hypothesis that I reject on the base of stylistic and archival examination.⁶⁷ As I will discuss in the next chapter, Giorgio Vasari reported that two painted cycles by Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo adorned the Vespucci's house in via de' Servi. Scholars have identified *The Story of Virginia* (Figure 141) and *The Story of Lucretia* (Figure 142) as the scenes depicted by Botticelli. While Vasari's description of the room containing works by Botticelli, which apparently comprised of small and lively figures, finds a visual parallel in *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia*, the same does not happen for *Mars and Venus*. The painting, in fact, appears stylistically different from the other two panels: while *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia* comprise of several figures depicted in several episodes and placed in a narrative context, *Mars and Venus* presents two monumental static characters in the centre of the composition. Archival evidence has moreover shown that the property in via de' Servi was purchased by the Vespucci in 1498. The building cannot therefore be considered the original location of *Mars and Venus*: if the painting was ever displayed there it must have been moved from a different location.⁶⁸ Through an investigation into the marriage history of the Vespucci, the following sections will reconsider the occasion

⁶⁵ HORNE 1980, 140. I could not find any information on the acquisition or collection history of *Mars and Venus* in the General Committee Minute Books (1866-1951) of the Burlington Fine Arts Club preserved in the National Art Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

⁶⁶ Private letters and memories of Angiolo Frescobaldi can be found in the Frescobaldi archive in the *filza* 'Memorie e documenti' and in the 'Lettere Frescobaldi'. I am grateful to Ilaria Marcelli for having assisted me during the visit to the Frescobaldi archive in summer 2011. For Alexander Barker and Angiolo Frescobaldi's friendship: FRESCOBALDI and SOLINAS 2004, 134, 198. For the network Barker was part of and for his interests in the Italian art market: FLEMING 1973, 11 n. 69; FLEMING 1979, 492-508.

⁶⁷ GERONIMUS 2006, 100; GERONIMUS 2012, 156.

⁶⁸ CAROCCI 1907, 109-110; DAVIES 1951, 78; GERONIMUS 2006, 100; CALAFATI 2007, 80.

of the commission of *Mars and Venus*, the identity of the patron, the execution date of the panel, and its original location.

4. Rethinking the occasion of the commission

One of the most debated aspects of *Mars and Venus* is the identification of the sitters. Every attempt to recognise a real couple behind Venus and Mars has always reached the same conclusion: the lady depicted is Simonetta Vespucci.⁶⁹ Further speculations were advanced over who might be represented as Mars, and the name of Giuliano de Medici, lover of Simonetta, was put forward. Such identification, however, raises several problems. If the panel was meant to be a marriage piece commissioned for a Vespucci wedding, why are Simonetta and Giuliano represented? If, as Jacques Mesnil argued, the panel was commissioned by the Medici rather than the Vespucci, why are the wasps represented?⁷⁰ These 'myths' generated around the Simonetta Vespucci and Botticelli's paintings reflect the lack of attention given to the Vespucci family and its history. A reconsideration of the panel, therefore, must take into account the historical documentation of the family, its members, the weddings celebrated, and the properties family members possessed and lived in. This will permit us to tackle the following questions: what wedding does the panel celebrate? Is it possible to identify the couple portrayed? Who was the patron of this work?

As seen in Chapter 1, the wedding between Simonetta Cattaneo and Marco Vespucci was arranged by Marco's father, Piero di Giuliano, when he reached Piombino as the Captain of the Florentine galleass in the service of Ferdinand of Aragon. In arranging the wedding, Piero probably sought to show his alliance to the Medici's political and economic interests. Simonetta's dowry, in fact, included income generated from the mineral rights of an iron ore on Elba. After the wedding was celebrated in Genoa in 1468 the couple made their way to Florence, where

⁶⁹ Simonetta has often been linked to the works of Botticelli. Her name emerged in relation to *The Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus* of the Uffizi and the *Portrait of a Lady* of Frankfurt: SUPINO 1900, 35-37; FARINA 2001, 74-88; RANDOLPH 2002, 209-210; LAZZI 2005, 219-226; PACINI 2011, 58-85.

⁷⁰ MESNIL 1938, 55.

Simonetta died in 1476.⁷¹ From the information gathered from archival documents and secondary resources, it is unlikely that *Mars and Venus* was meant to be painted for the young couple. The panel is conventionally dated around 1483-85 while the wedding between Simonetta and Marco took place in 1468. It seems, therefore, difficult to imagine that the painting was commissioned to commemorate a wedding that happened nearly twenty years earlier.⁷² The identification of the couple with Simonetta and Marco makes the hypothesis of the panel being in the house along via de' Servi, object of the following chapter, unsustainable. Not only was this house bought three decades after Simonetta and Marco's wedding, but investigation in the *catasto* has also proved that Simonetta and Marco lived together in Marco's father house in Borgo Ognissanti. It therefore seems a contradiction that *Mars and Venus* was displayed in the *palazzo* of a couple the panel was not painted for.

Another hypothesis sees in Botticelli's panel an overt reference to Simonetta and Giuliano de' Medici. Scholars have often stressed the similarities between Venus and other female portraits by Botticelli that have been identified as Simonetta Vespucci, who was celebrated as one of the most beautiful ladies of Renaissance Florence.⁷³ In his 'Lectures on the National Gallery' Jean Paul Richter proposed that the couple painted by Botticelli did not intend to represent Venus or Mars but Giuliano de' Medici and Simonetta Vespucci.⁷⁴ The possibility of identifying a portrait of Simonetta in the representation of Venus was also advanced by Igino Benvenuto Supino. The author highlighted the peculiar physiognomy of Venus: large forehead, pointed chin, and a distinguished nose, which characterised the Venus as similar to the lady portrayed by Botticelli in the

⁷¹ For the life of Simonetta, the arrangement and celebration of the wedding, and the love of Giuliano de' Medici for Simonetta: FARINA 2001, 10-37; TOGNARINI 2002, 12; ETTLE 2008, 4.

⁷² THIEBAUT 1991, 100-1; JUREN 1971, 644.

⁷³ For an overview of the paintings in which scholars have speculated on the possibility of seeing the physiognomy of Simonetta Vespucci: SUPINO 1900, 31; MESNIL 1938, 55; BARFUCCI and BECHERUCCI 1964, 108-110; SCHMITTER 1995, 33-57; VENTRONE 2007, 7-49; PACINI 2011, 58-85; LUCHS 1012, 86-91. The portrait of Simonetta Vespucci has been also seen in the female character dressed in red in the lunette of the Vespucci chapel: CALAMANDREI 1935, 8.

⁷⁴ RICHTER 1898, 53-57.

Frankfurt panel.⁷⁵ The female figure represented in the latter has been identified as a portrait of Simonetta Vespucci. What led to this association was the fact that Vasari stated that a portrait of Simonetta was in the collection of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici; and Aby Warburg recognized that the cameo worn by the woman in the Frankfurt panel represented a cornelian of Apollo and Marsya in the Medici collection.⁷⁶

A close analysis of Botticelli's paintings shows, however, that the features highlighted by Supino fit the majority of the female characters painted by the artist: the bride in *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti*, the ladies represented in *The Primavera* and in *The Birth of Venus*, and the Virgins depicted throughout the artist's religious production. Monika Schmitter has suggested that the similarities between Botticelli's female figures have a precise reason: that Botticelli transformed a real woman – Simonetta – into an ideal one based on Petrarch's poetry.⁷⁷ The line between portraiture and idealization seems to be very thin and there is not enough evidence to prove that Simonetta was taken as the model for any of Botticelli's ladies. The female figures represented by the artist follow a precise pictorial standard - rosy cheeks, red lips, blonde hair, and pale skin – which, according to the literary canon sanctioned by Petrarch, suggests that they were conventional depictions rather than real portraits.⁷⁸ It seems therefore that the painting is a compromise between ideal and real beauty: the latter aspect is represented through the use of contemporary ornaments.⁷⁹ Identifying Botticelli's paintings as portraits of Simonetta proves therefore problematic as considering the panel a representation of Simonetta and Giuliano. If, as seems likely, the painting

⁷⁵ SUPINO 1900, 35-37.

⁷⁶ For the history of the panel and a sum up of the previous studies: LIGHTBOWN 1978, 116-117 vol.2.

⁷⁷ SCHMITTER 1995, 33. Also Herbert Horne argued against a possible identification of Venus with Simonetta: HORNE 1980, 140-142

⁷⁸ PETRARCA 1965, 55-60 (*Rima XXXVII*), 347 (*Rima CCLIII*).

⁷⁹ Blond hair was an emblem of female beauty during the Quattrocento: BETTELLA 2005, 133. This canon persisted well into the sixteenth century. Aileen Ribeiro showed how during the Cinquecento ladies made use of cosmetics to reach the canons of ideal beauty formulated in literary writings: RIBEIRO 2011, 64.

was conceived and commissioned within the Vespucci domestic sphere, the patron must be looked for in this household.

In his study, Gombrich pointed out the difficulty in identifying a Vespucci marriage chronologically related to the panel, conventionally dated after 1480. The author remarked that the Vespucci was not included in Litta's study of Italian families and that the family's genealogical tree drawn by Bandini omitted wedding dates.⁸⁰ After the publication of Gombrich's article, the impossibility of identifying a Vespucci marriage that can be linked to Botticelli's panel has always been stressed. The comparative lack of interest in the Vespucci has meant that art historians have not considered the historical and genealogical studies published by Gustavo Uzielli in 1898. Uzielli not only provided the transcription of some of the Vespucci's tax declarations, but he also presented a new family tree, which includes the marriage dates for the members listed.⁸¹ Despite being one of the most precise genealogical studies of the Vespucci lineages, Uzielli's tree still presented omissions and incongruities which the new tree, previously discussed and represented in Appendix 1, Genealogy 1 tries to overcome.

Uzielli's study complicates the already blurred aspects around the commission of *Mars and Venus*. The genealogical tree published by the author does not present any Vespucci weddings celebrated in the years in which *Mars and Venus* has been said to be executed. The only marriage in the 1480s was that of Antonia di Simone Vespucci and Antonio di Vanni Strozzi, celebrated in 1488.⁸² As the panel prominently displays the Vespucci heraldic device it must be assumed that it was done to celebrate a wedding within the Vespucci household, and that it was commissioned by the family themselves, who chose to have their family emblem integrated in the narrative of the painting. The painted furniture meant to decorate a couple's bedroom were generally commissioned and paid for by the

⁸⁰ GOMBRICH 1972, 216 n. 139 and 140.

⁸¹ First published in 1898, the tree was recently re-published in the fifth volume of the *I Navigatori Toscani* by Marco Conti: CONTI 2012b, 60-87.

⁸² CONTI 2012b, 60-87.

groom's family.⁸³ This suggests that the painting is associated with the wedding of a male member of the Vespucci family. There are three such weddings: that of Guidoantonio di Giovanni; his brother Simone di Giovanni; and Marco di Piero Vespucci. While the first two marriages took place in the first half of the 1470s and thus do not match the style of Botticelli's panel, which is stylistically too advanced in comparison to other works realised in the early 1470s, the second marriage of Marco Vespucci invites further investigation.

After his first wife Simonetta's death, Piero di Giuliano arranged the marriage of his son Marco to Costanza di Recco Capponi as a document retrieved in the Archivio di Stato, belonging to the private *ricordanze* of Costanza's father, demonstrates.⁸⁴ In a page of his diary, dated January 1477 (1476 Florentine calendar), Recco Capponi recorded to have promised his daughter Costanza as the bride of Marco Vespucci on January 25; on January 28 they made the union official in Santa Maria del Fiore; and on January 31 he accompanied Costanza to her new home.⁸⁵ Marco's second wedding must have been meaningful for the family. Just like other Florentines, the Vespucci cared about the continuation of the male line and, as no progeny came from the union with Simonetta, the Vespucci must have had good hopes for the one with Costanza. The commission of *Mars and Venus* would have stressed the importance of the wedding and the idea of physical love, so prominent in the painting, signalled the hope of a prosperous and fertile future.

Scant information survives on Marco Vespucci, beyond his two weddings: born in 1453, he enrolled in the Arte del Cambio in 1469, and died in 1497. More information exists on his father Piero and a clearer picture of this personality can be constructed through archival material and secondary sources.⁸⁶ The evidence gathered suggests Piero as the most likely patron of *Mars and Venus*. Very close to the Medici and its entourage, Piero participated in Giuliano de' Medici *giostra* of

⁸³ WITTHOFT 1982, 43-59.

⁸⁴ The *ricordanze* of Recco Capponi were written between 1433-1488: ASF, Corp. Sopp. dal Governo Francese, San Piero a Monticelli, 153. Unnumbered folios.

⁸⁵ For the Florentine calendar: CAPPELLI 1998, 8.

⁸⁶ On Marco Vespucci: LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 4, Folder 'Marco Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios.

1469; he was granted the possibility of having Lorenzo il Magnifico's doctor sent to his home to take care of Simonetta during her illness; and his friendship with Benedetto Dei and Luigi Pulci demonstrate he was acquainted with the Medicean cultural circles.⁸⁷ Travelling widely throughout the Mediterranean as a Captain of the Florentine galleys, Piero also closely collaborated with Lorenzo il Magnifico on a political level. In 1470 he was sent as an ambassador to the King of Naples; in 1471 he was elected *Vicario* of the Mugello and Scarperia; and he became *Podestà* of Milan in 1474 and of Bologna in 1475. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Piero's relationship with the Medici cracked in 1478 when, accused of playing a part in the Pazzi conspiracy, he was imprisoned in the Stinche.⁸⁸ Piero was set free in 1480 when he moved to Milan under the protection of Gian Galeazzo Maria Sforza. Here he worked for the Duke of Milan as a *commissario* to Lugano, Tortona, and finally to Alessandria (near Turin) where Piero died in 1485.⁸⁹ The chain of events in Piero's life invites the assumption that the commission of *Mars and Venus* must have occurred at some point between Marco and Costanza's wedding (January 1477) and the imprisonment of Piero in the Stinche (May 1478). This, therefore, moves the conventional execution date of the panel to the end of the 1470s from the 1480s. Proof that supports Piero as the patron of the painting, and the late 1470s as its execution date, can be obtained when considering the sallet worn by one of the satyrs (Figure 105).

Despite the important role that arms had in Renaissance visual and political culture, Botticelli's sallet has barely been considered by art historians.⁹⁰ Following the conventional date of the panel, Paola Ventrone dated Botticelli's sallet around the 1480s, establishing a comparison with a helmet of Brescia (Figure 106) believed

⁸⁷ Chapter 1, pages 64-65.

⁸⁸ At this time, Marco wrote to Lorenzo il Magnifico explaining the bad conditions that his father was facing in prison. Shortly after the letter was sent, Marco was exiled from Florence and he moved to the court of Milan: FARINA 2001, 40. For Marco's letter: ASF, MAP, filza 36, f. 506r.

⁸⁹ For information about Piero's life: Loc, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, Folder 'Piero Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios. Rachele Farina published a brief summary of Piero and Marco's lives after the Pazzi conspiracy. In the Milan State Archive, the author also located the *fondi* that preserve the letters sent by Piero to Lodovico il Moro from Lugano, Tortona and Alessandria: FARINA 2001, 30-36, 40-41.

⁹⁰ PATTERSON 2009, 14.

to have been realised around the same time.⁹¹ The chronology of these surviving sallets, however, is problematic and it is difficult to date them precisely. General consensus considers Italian *celate* such as the one depicted by Botticelli, characterised by the presence of a long 'tail' at the back, as executed between 1475 and 1500.⁹² The fluid chronology of these objects further supports the possibility of bringing the execution of the panel back in time.

Botticelli's armour also establishes a connection with the Vespucci family, strengthening the links between the panel and Piero di Giuliano. As previously mentioned, Piero Vespucci took part in the city's *giostre* and knightly games. The presence of jousting arms in Botticelli's panel is therefore curious and perhaps suggests a connection with Piero Vespucci, defined with the attribute *eques* in fifteenth-century sources.⁹³ Moreover, the *celata* placed on the head of the baby satyr is reminiscent of northern Italian sallets, such as those produced in Milan and Brescia.⁹⁴ Once again this establishes a connection with Piero who, between 1474 and 1475, was appointed *Podestà* of Milan. Here he maintained an enduring friendship with the Duke and his court, and it cannot be excluded that he entered in possession of a *celata* similar to the one depicted by Botticelli.

5. Re-dating *Mars and Venus*

The possibility of dating the panel around 1477-1478 also emerges from a careful consideration of the painting's style. It is well known that classical antiquity fascinated Renaissance artists and humanists over the fifteenth century. The

⁹¹ VENTRONE 1992b, 189-205. Developed in the period 1420 to 1500, sallets were the most common type of helmet together with *barbute*, or barbuts. The visors differ: while the former was completely open at the front, the latter presented a T or Y shaped face opening as shown by the example depicted on the intarsia panel from the *studiolo* of Federico da Montefeltro, OAKESHOTT 1980, 109-124; NICKEL et al. 1982, 23.

⁹² I am grateful to Andrea Carloni for having discussed with me the chronology of fifteenth-century sallets.

⁹³ For the letters in which Piero signed himself as *eques*: LoC, Vespucci Family Papers, Box 5, Folder 'Piero Vespucci'. Unnumbered folios.

⁹⁴ BOCCIA and ROSSI 1980, 80. Although the precise and realistic representation of Mars's sallet suggests that Botticelli had a model available, at the present stage of the research it is impossible to determine where the sallet exactly came from. The sallet depicted by Botticelli, in fact, lacks any maker's mark, which would have helped in locating the provenance of the helmet. On the peculiarity of the maker's mark: ROSSI 1971, 22; NICKEL et al., 1982, 24

growing admiration for the classical past was expressed in a newly rediscovered interest for ancient literature, history, and moral philosophy. The appreciation for antiquities was also reflected in the works of architects, sculptors, and painters, including Botticelli.⁹⁵ Given the apparent relationship between some of Botticelli's paintings and classical examples, art historians dated the artist's works after his stay in Rome where he was likely to have seen ancient sculptures and reliefs. Botticelli was, in fact, one of the Florentine artists who, between 1480 and 1482, travelled to Rome to take part in the decoration of the Sistine Chapel.⁹⁶ *Mars and Venus* is considered to be a painting realised by Botticelli after his return from Rome. The panel has therefore been dated after 1480.⁹⁷

In 1925 Erika Tietze-Conrat connected *Mars and Venus* to a sarcophagus representing *Bacchus discovering Ariadne at Naxos* (Figure 107), arguing that Botticelli's painting had been strongly influenced by the reclining figures on its sculpted lid.⁹⁸ Scholars have, not however, been unanimous in accepting this connection. Helen Ettlinger, for instance, argued that no classical sources had been employed by Botticelli, who could have found models for his panel in the top and bottom strips of the frame of Ghiberti's second baptistery door.⁹⁹ Similarly, Patricia Rubin suggested that there is no evidence to believe that the sarcophagus indicated by Tietze-Conrat was known at the time, and Botticelli could have used other models for his Mars.¹⁰⁰ In particular, an antique statue of a sleeping hermaphrodite, admired in Florence and praised by Lorenzo Ghiberti, seems to have inspired the realisation of Mars's foot caught in the drapery.¹⁰¹

Building on these statements, this section will re-consider the previous analyses of *Mars and Venus*, examining the classical sources from a new

⁹⁵ For recent studies on the discovery of antiquity during the Renaissance: GREGORI 2004, *passim*.

⁹⁶ The three scenes depicted by Botticelli were: *The Punishment of Korah*, *The Temptation of Christ*, and the *Events of the Life of Moses*. CECCHI 2005, 184-200. For an overview of the Florentine artists who took part in the decoration of the Sistine Chapel in Rome: NESSELRATH 2003, 39-75.

⁹⁷ CANEVA 1987, 45; ZÖLLNER 1998, 14.

⁹⁸ TIETZE-CONRAT 1925, 124-125.

⁹⁹ ETLINGER 1976, 141.

¹⁰⁰ RUBIN 2000, 177 n. 2.

¹⁰¹ DUNKERTON 1991, 336; RUBIN and WRIGHT 1999, 332; ARSCOTT 2000, 177 n. 2.

perspective. Investigation will suggest that, deriving from classical models, images of reclining sleeping male figures started to be employed in Florentine artistic production during the fourteenth century when this motif was used for the representation of biblical episodes. This challenges the hypotheses previously made about *Mars and Venus*, suggesting that Botticelli was aware of this iconographical motif before his Roman journey. This also confirms that the conventional date of *Mars and Venus* should be questioned.

Two sculpted works dated to the 1470s have been associated with *Mars and Venus* and proposed as models for Botticelli's panel. The first is a fifteenth-century mirror frame at the Victoria and Albert Museum of London (Figure 108). A circular relief, the mirror was contained in a gilt wood frame in the form of the Medici ring, with the diamond at the top.¹⁰² The scene is crowded with *putti*, variously placed at the top supporting a shield, and on the side riding a goose and a dragon. The two reclining naked figures at the base have been identified as Venus and the sleeping Mars, the latter said to have been adapted from a classical sarcophagus of Endymion condemned to sleep forever.¹⁰³ The second is a small sculpture by Andrea del Verrocchio preserved in Berlin representing a sleeping youth (Figure 109). Paul Barolsky already pointed out the connection between Verrocchio's statuette and Botticelli's Mars: both figures are represented asleep, in a reclining position, and with one leg bent.¹⁰⁴

According to Günter Passavant and Richard David Serros, an antique source might have influenced Verrocchio's statuette.¹⁰⁵ The artist was likely to have seen examples of ancient statues, but no certain source has been identified for the *Sleeping Youth*. While Passavant highlighted the strong connection with the *Dying Gaul* in the Capitoline Museum in Rome, Serros suggested that the over life-size

¹⁰² The frame takes the form of a ring set with a diamond, an insignia used by Piero de' Medici and later members of the family: AMES-LEWIS 1979, 126. Diamond rings appear also in Botticelli's *Minerva and the Centaur* where they adorn the dress of the goddess. For an overview on the use of the Medici ring in visual sources: MALAGUZZI 2000, 35-40.

¹⁰³ RUBIN and WRIGHT 1999, 320-21.

¹⁰⁴ BAROLSKY 1978, 38.

¹⁰⁵ PASSAVANT 1969, 36; SERROS 1999, 352-356.

Hellenistic marble *Torso of a Satyr* in the Uffizi might have been employed as a model due to the similar pose and the degree of musculature.¹⁰⁶ On the basis of the statuette's nudity, the author also posited a connection between Verrocchio's *Sleeping Youth* and the biblical representations of Adam asleep at the time of his creation, or when Eve was created from his rib.¹⁰⁷ This hypothesis seems plausible as images of the sleeping reclined Adam circulated in Florence since the Trecento. A *formella* by Andrea Pisano representing the creation of Eve (Figure 110) was, for instance, included in the lower storey of the basement of Giotto's *campanile* of Florence cathedral.¹⁰⁸

The small size of Verrocchio's *Sleeping Youth* would suggest that the statuette was used as a *bozzetto*, or study, to be employed as a visual support for the accomplishment of a bigger work.¹⁰⁹ It is not known which work it might have been used for although a similar looking sleeping figure, identified as a soldier, appears in Verrocchio's *Resurrection* at the Bargello (Figure 111). The presence of a sleeping soldier in Verrocchio's *Resurrection* was not new to the representation of this biblical episode, it being employed since medieval times. What is noteworthy, however, is the specific pose of some of these soldiers since the late Trecento. Around 1328-1334 Taddeo Gaddi painted a reclining sleeping soldier in Santa Croce on the entrance wall of the Cappella Baroncelli (Figure 112).¹¹⁰ Around 1365-1367 Andrea di Bonaiuto frescoed the Cappellone degli Spagnoli, located in the cloister of Santa Maria Novella. His *Resurrection* features a sleeping soldier on the bottom right side (Figure 113). A few years later, between 1403-1424, Lorenzo Ghiberti sculpted a similar *Resurrection* scene for the North Door of Florence's Baptistery.

¹⁰⁶ Serros argues that the *Torso of a Satyr* is not documented till 1778 and it is not known when or where it was discovered. According to the author it might have been one of the specimens in the Medici collection at the garden near San Marco, as it appears that Lorenzo Ghiberti looked to it in 1402-03 when designing his figure of Isaac in the Sacrifice of Isaac. The *Torso of a Satyr* also appears to have inspired the form of the figure of the dead Christ in Verrocchio's destroyed terracotta relief of the *Lamentation* of the early 1480s, formerly in the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum in Berlin: SERROS 1999, 355.

¹⁰⁷ SERROS 1999, 355.

¹⁰⁸ CARLOTTI 2008, 48-57.

¹⁰⁹ SERROS 1999, 352. For the use of three-dimensional *bozzetti* in Quattrocento workshops: PRINZ 1977, 200-208.

¹¹⁰ LADIS 1982, 88-112.

Here, on the right side, a soldier is represented in a reclined position, asleep on his shield, and with bent legs (Figure 114).¹¹¹ In 1445-1469 the sculptor and ceramist Luca della Robbia was in charge of working on the door and lunette of the New Sacristy in Santa Maria del Fiore. The lunette, realised in the blue and white ceramics characteristic of the Della Robbia workshop, presents a sleeping soldier (Figure 115), which was associated by Maud Cruttwell with Verrocchio's *Sleeping Youth*.¹¹²

It should also be mentioned that among the drawings realised in the first half of the fifteenth century, there were some representing Roman reliefs taken from the Arch of Costantine and the Trajan's Column.¹¹³ An interesting example is the drawing attributed to a Lombard artist and dated to the 1460s. The work represents the battle between Trajan and the Dacians, a relief placed on the east side of the Arch of Constantine (Figure 116 a and b). The interesting part of the drawing for our purpose is the Dacians in the background. The soldiers are represented while blowing their horns before the battle: this act, together with the presence of the lances, recalls Botticelli's *Mars and Venus*, where one of the satyrs holds the lance and blows into the conch shell. Although it cannot be ascertained how and if these drawings circulated in Florence, it cannot be excluded that Botticelli might have come across them. The representation of battles taken from Roman reliefs could have been another source of inspiration for *Mars and Venus*.¹¹⁴

These examples prove that reclining nude male figures like that of Mars circulated in Florence as early as the Trecento and were likely to have influenced fifteenth-century artists, including Botticelli. Derived from ancient reliefs where they referred to pagan gods, male sleeping figures embodied Christian meanings

¹¹¹ On Ghiberti's classicism in the North Door of Florence's Baptistery: MOROLLI 1988, 35-70.

¹¹² CRUTTWELL 1904, 57-60. Also Passavant connected the Resurrection of Careggi with Luca della Robbia's lunette over the door of the Sacristy in Florence's cathedral: PASSAVANT 1969, 38-39. The historiography on Verrocchio's terracotta and the Resurrection has been pulled together in: BUTTERFIELD 1997, 215.

¹¹³ CAVALLARO 1988, 181-191.

¹¹⁴ For the problematic aspects related to the survival of Renaissance drawings: AMES-LEWIS 1981, 7-10.

during the Middle Ages, variously used to represent Adam and the sleeping soldiers of the Resurrection. In the fifteenth century, artists such as Pollaiuolo and Botticelli brought back its original connotations, employing it to represent mythological characters like Mars. Therefore, given the evidence gathered, dating Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* on the base of Mars's iconography is problematic. It is also problematic to date the panel by establishing a stylistic comparison with *The Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus*, and *Minerva and the Centaur*. These paintings have all been associated with one another for the monumentality of their figures and for connections with classical sources. However a careful examination of Botticelli's studies proves the rather uncertain chronology that exists for these works. Despite several attempts, these paintings have not been unanimously located to a precise time and the proposed dates variously fluctuate between the late 1470s and the mid-1480s. In line with the dating proposed by Bode and Van Marle, I would therefore argue that the realisation of *Mars and Venus* fell in the late 1470s before Botticelli's departure to Rome.¹¹⁵ Beyond stylistic reasons, dating the painting at the end of the 1470s also supports the hypothesis of the panel being a marriage piece, commissioned for the wedding of Marco di Piero Vespucci and Costanza di Recco Capponi celebrated in 1477. Given the panel was meant to decorate the couple's bed chamber, I suggest that the house of Piero Vespucci in Borgo Ognissanti was the original location of *Mars and Venus*. According to the *catasto* of 1480, Marco and Costanza lived in Piero's house.¹¹⁶

6. The meaning of the panel: Stressing physical and epithalamial love

Over the years, different hypotheses have been advanced as to the literary and philosophical sources that could have influenced the realisation of *Mars and Venus*, and two main streams of thoughts have divided scholars' opinions. On one hand scholars suggested to interpret Botticelli's *Mars and Venus*, *The Primavera*, and

¹¹⁵ BODE 1921, 82-83, 116; VAN MARLE 1931, vol. 12, 87-90; vol. 13, 344.

¹¹⁶ ASF, Catasto, Santa Maria Novella, Unicorno, 1010 (1480), f. 406r. In 1498 Marco declared that he was living with his mother, his wife Costanza and their sons and daughters in a house in Borgo Ognissanti, presumably the same property that had belonged to his father Piero: ASF, Decima Repubblicana, 21 (1498), Santa Maria Novella, Gonfalone Unicorno, ff. 178r-181v.

Minerva and the Centaur according to Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonic ideas that flourished in fifteenth-century Florence.¹¹⁷ The activities of Ficino's so-called Academy involved conversations, banquets and discussions around the universe; the immortality of the soul; human love; and the conception of religion and its relationship to philosophy.¹¹⁸ Some of these themes have been used to interpret the meaning of Botticelli's paintings: Gombrich, for instance, linked *Mars and Venus* to Ficino's astrological interpretation of the myth of Mars and Venus, according to which Mars's outstanding strength among the planets did not prevent Venus from mastering and appeasing him.¹¹⁹

Other scholars, on the other hand, proposed to identify the sources of *Mars and Venus* in the vernacular literature of early Renaissance Florence.¹²⁰ Herbert Horne suggested looking for the source of the painting in Poliziano's *Stanze per la Giostra*, while Franz Wickhoff proposed Responsiano's *De concubitu Martis et Veneris* as a valid alternative.¹²¹ Wickhoff's idea was however rejected by Ronald Lightbown who argued that the ancient poet Responsiano was not known in the Quattrocento.¹²² A further hypothesis saw Botticelli's panel inspired by Lucian's description of a painting representing the wedding of Alexander the Great and the Persian princess Roxanne by Aetion.¹²³ In light of the argument built in the previous sections of this chapter, in particular the new date of the panel and the erotic allusion conveyed by the lance, the shell, and the squirting cucumber, this final section will revise previous interpretations of the panel, showing that the links between the panel and Ficino's writings need to be reconsidered. Building upon the studies that sought to identify the sources for *Mars in Venus* in the writings of

¹¹⁷ For Neoplatonism: SALVINI 1958, 40; PANOFSKY 1960, 191-200; KRISTELLER 1980, 89-101; SNOW-SMITH 1993, 69, 130, 146; MALAGUZZI 2000, 35-40; AMES-LEWIS 2002, 327-338; CHENEY 2002, 177-188; MICHALSKI 2003, 213-222; ALEXANDRAKIS 2004, 187-195; DEE 2013, 4-33. On the influence of Ficino and Neoplatonism on Florentine art: CHASTEL 1975, 57-171; OLSON 2002, 81-108; PAOLINI 2012, 7-49.

¹¹⁸ KRISTELLER 1980, 93-98; RAFFINI 1998, 9-57; CELENZA 2001, 15-34; CELENZA 2007, 72-96; CLUCAS 2011, 13-148; GIGLIONI 2011, 19-51.

¹¹⁹ GOMBRICH 1972, 66-69.

¹²⁰ For a connection between *Mars and Venus* and vernacular literature: BAROLSKY 1978, 41-45.

¹²¹ SUPINO 1900, 31; WICKHOFF 1906, 206-207; SALVINI 1958, 41; HORNE 1980, 140-142.

¹²² LIGHTBOWN 1978, 55.

¹²³ THIEBAUT 1991, 100-101; LIGHTBOWN 1978, 55; ACIDINI LUCHINAT 2001, 201.

Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Angelo Poliziano, attention will shift away from Ficino to fifteenth-century vernacular poetry.¹²⁴ Departing from a Neoplatonic interpretation of *Mars and Venus* will also require a reinterpretation of the squirting cucumber, whose presence has been previously explained in light of Ficino's theories and writings. Turning a focus on fifteenth-century herbals, I will consider the fruit for its medical properties and attempt to connect its presence to the wedding of Marco Vespucci and Costanza Capponi.

Centred on the theme of love, *Mars and Venus* has been seen as an allegory of the power of love over strife: Venus, goddess of Love, stares at a sleeping and defeated Mars, god of war.¹²⁵ The painting has been linked, in particular, to a passage in Ficino's *De Amore* where it is explained how love, through the sight of beauty, can lead men's soul toward the divine.¹²⁶ According to Ficino, contemplation was a direct spiritual experience during which the soul withdrew from the body moving towards the transcendent Idea and God himself.¹²⁷ This mystical experience was achieved through what Ficino called *furor*, or frenzy, which could encompass poetry, prophecy, and love. The latter was defined by the author as the desire for beauty that, seen in the physical appearance of the lover, acted as a force that could lead men towards God.¹²⁸ Maria Ruvoldt sought to establish a connection between images of sleeping male figures (such as Botticelli's Mars) and divine inspiration, arguing that through dreams, men could reach the ideal condition for divine union.¹²⁹ Sleep was valued in the Renaissance because of its divinatory powers and the prophetic nature of dreams. Associated with love, sleep was seen as a spiritual journey of ascension from physical desire to spiritual contemplation and ecstatic connection to heaven initiated by the sight of beauty:

¹²⁴ DEMPSEY 1992, 3-19.

¹²⁵ ETTLINGER 1976, 138-139; RUVOLDT 2004, 37-38; DEMPSEY 2012, 85.

¹²⁶ FICINO 1987, 85-87; LEITGEB 2006, 39-97. For a recent commented edition of the *De Amore*: LEITGEB 2010, 13-192.

¹²⁷ KRISTELLER 1980, 94.

¹²⁸ FICINO 1987, 85-87; HENDRIX 2010, 89-102.

¹²⁹ RUVOLDT 2004, 2.

while sleeping the soul, free from the constraints of the body, could communicate with the divine.

David Bellingham argued that Ficino did not conceive the separation of the soul from the body as a mere metaphor, but rather as a magical flight he believed people could really attain during their life. Establishing a connection between Botticelli's fruit and Ficino's *furor*, the author suggested that the fruit in *Mars and Venus* could be identified as the *Datura stramonium*, a plant known for its hallucinogenic effects.¹³⁰ Referring to Ficino's theory of magic, Brian Copenhaver discussed the interest that fifteenth-century humanists had in exploring the properties of stones, plants, and substances and their links to medicine, physics and metaphysic. The author noted that in his *De Vita Triplici* Ficino made a list of the objects which he recommended to his readers for their capacity of attracting celestial powers: plants, animals, and stones were perceived as the terrestrial links with the All.¹³¹ According to Bellingham the *Datura*, with its drug-like effect, could have served the same purpose.

Despite the compelling nature of these hypotheses, such interpretations of *Mars and Venus* need to be revised. The identification of the fruit with the squirting cucumber opens up new avenues of investigation, proposing a more earthy meaning for the fruit. According to John Riddle, who investigated abortion and contraception practices in the early Renaissance, squirting cucumbers were the 'preferred drug for abortion'.¹³² Medical knowledge about squirting cucumbers had been handed down from the Graeco-Roman world. Texts such as *De Medicina* and *De Materia Medica* that, as seen earlier, circulated in Florence in 1478, associated squirting cucumbers with abortion, discussing their use in facilitating menstruation and 'purging' the body of an unwanted fetus.¹³³ Although the use of the squirting

¹³⁰ BELLINGHAM 2010, 347-374. For the properties of the *Datura stramonium*: NIZZOLI 2003, 16.

¹³¹ COPENHAVER 1992, 51-82. For a recent study of the relationship between art and magic in fifteenth-century Neoplatonism: DEBENEDETTI 2013, 57-64.

¹³² RIDDLE 1992, 77.

¹³³ Dioscorides used the squirting cucumber also to make the 'abortion wine': RIDDLE 1992, 54, 77,

cucumber is in apparent contrast with the erotic interpretation of the panel I have already proposed, I suggest a possible explanation to overcome this incongruity.

The studies of Paul Barolsky and Patricia Simons have focused on the presence of wit and humor within *Mars and Venus*. In his study of Renaissance jest, Barolsky stressed the playful overtones of *Mars and Venus*, indicated by the presence of cheeky satyrs and adolescent looking gods.¹³⁴ Patricia Simons took a step further, arguing that viewers would have seen and understood the joke concealed within the painting: the baby satyr, ready to blow into the shell, is about to wake up Mars and the wasps next to him.¹³⁵ Imagining the hilarious consequences derived from the satyr's joke would have provoked the viewer's laughter and, just like Mars's orgasm, the ejection of his *pneuma*, inducing the viewer's psychosomatic approach to the painting.¹³⁶ Building upon this, I suggest that the peculiar presence of the squirting cucumber, not represented in other paintings by Botticelli, should also be interpreted as an element of wit and humor. The green fruit, half hidden under the hand of the mischievous satyr, might have been used by Botticelli as a lighthearted warning for Marco Vespucci: given that Simonetta left Marco without sons, Marco and his wife Costanza should have avoided anything that might have prevented them from conceiving healthy male heirs to avoid the same fate. Botticelli's joke must not have gone unnoticed, as in 1498 Marco listed four sons and four daughters among the *bocche* of his tax declaration (Appendix 1, Genealogy 3).¹³⁷

On the basis of the argument constructed so far, I believe that the sources for Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* should be looked for in the vernacular poetry of fifteenth-century Florence. Petrarch's writings, in particular, are a compelling source of investigation. Well known in the Renaissance, these texts influenced the works of Florentine humanists such as Poliziano's *Stanze*, in which literary

¹³⁴ BAROLSKY 1978, 209.

¹³⁵ BAROLSKY 1978, 42-45; SIMONS 2011, 113.

¹³⁶ SIMONS 2011, 113.

¹³⁷ ASF, Decima Repubblica, 21 (1498), Santa Maria Novella, Gonfalone Unicorno, ff. 178r-181v.

conventions about love and beauty are mixed with Platonic thoughts.¹³⁸ As seen above, Petrarch's poetry is likely to have influenced Botticelli's representation of the female form. I would moreover add that the peculiar pose of Mars, asleep and powerless, might have been moulded after some excerpts from Petrarch's *Rime Sparse*. In this collection of sonnets, the male lover is often described disarmed in front of the lover (*disarmato*) and unable to sustain the sight of his beloved.¹³⁹

Other literary sources to which attention could be directed are wedding poems: Jane Long has discussed the circulation of fifteenth-century writings in which Venus was represented not only in her celestial aspect, but also for her physical and sensual value.¹⁴⁰ Although Long's study evolved around the analysis of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, the considerations made by the author can easily be applied to *Mars and Venus*. Long demonstrated that since antiquity Venus had been the 'patron of sensory delights'.¹⁴¹ Used throughout the Middle Ages, the image of the goddess as a sign of passion was employed by Boccaccio, who defined the physical environment as belonging to the realm of Venus. Furthermore, Venus was also invoked in wedding poems used by the mid-Quattrocento in the celebration of elite weddings.¹⁴² These writings focused on the ability of the goddess to provoke appropriate sensual response and linked her explicitly with the production of children - the principal aim of fifteenth-century marriages.¹⁴³ It is evident from this analysis that *Mars and Venus*, like other later works of Botticelli, was based on a plurality of literary sources which had been adapted to fit the painting: courtly love themes of the Petrarchan tradition were mixed with contemporary epithalamial writings, joining together the 'celestial' and carnal value of the beloved and the celebration of chivalric love. Later paintings commissions associated with weddings, such as the *History of Jason and Medea* realised for Lorenzo Tornabuoni and

¹³⁸ CONTINI 1998, 134, 439; DEMPSEY 1992, 3-19.

¹³⁹ PETRARCA 1965, 5 (*Rima* III) and 58 (*Rima* XXXVII).

¹⁴⁰ LONG 2008, 1-27.

¹⁴¹ LONG 2008, 10.

¹⁴² On wedding orations in fifteenth-century Italy: D'ELIA 2002, 379-433; D'ELIA 2004, 35-50; BRIDGEMAN 2013, 13-17.

¹⁴³ For childbearing in Renaissance Italy: MUSACCHIO 1998, 66-82.

discussed by Caroline Campbell and others, similarly showed the intertwining of classical, modern, and chivalric traditions, providing an insight into the multiple cultural interests of Florentine patrons.¹⁴⁴

The celebration of physical desire and chivalric love finds a visual expression in *Mars and Venus*. I would, in fact, argue that also the eroticised gaze of Venus should be interpreted in the light of these vernacular literary works. Michael Camille discussed the meaning of literary works and visual images of the Middle Ages that featured a female looking at a man.¹⁴⁵ The author linked such representations to chivalric ideas connected to knightly games: during jousts women admired the male body in action, as surviving images engraved on caskets and domestic objects attest.¹⁴⁶ *Mars and Venus*, whose pose could also be reminiscent of lovers looking at each other in surviving artifacts, seems to partly depend on this chivalric tradition. The front side of a fourteenth-century casket (Figure 117), for example, shows two lovers on either side of the lock peeping at each other. The woman is on the side of the keyhole, which indicates her closed and virginal state: marriage was the key to open the box and penetrate the body. According to Camille, voyeurism was a theme of both courtly literature and images associated with love.¹⁴⁷ It seems therefore possible to link the staring Venus to the idea of physical love: the powerful gaze, capable of fetishisation and arousal of sexual feelings, eroticises Mars's male body. It seems therefore possible to link the staring Venus to the idea of physical love: the powerful gaze, capable of fetishisation and arousal of sexual feelings, eroticises Mars's male body.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, as Maria Ruvoldt discussed, Mars's loose limbs could indicate his abandonment to sensual pleasure and female control, which would be in line with the erotic meaning of the painting.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ CLOUGH 1990, 24-47; CAMPBELL 2007, 1-19. SMAN 2010B, passim.

¹⁴⁵ CAMILLE 1998, 34-39.

¹⁴⁶ Among the objects mentioned by the author there is the casket representing ladies watching knights during a joust (British Museum, London). CAMILLE 1998, 35. The survival of chivalric ideals during the Renaissance was discussed in GRENDLER 1995, 59-102.

¹⁴⁷ Camille 1998, 42.

¹⁴⁸ FREEDBERG 1989, 352.

¹⁴⁹ RUVOLDT 2004, 38.

The present study of *Mars and Venus*, based on the analysis of archival documentation and on a new examination of Botticelli's style, models, and material culture, has allowed for a reconsideration of the original function of the panel, the proposal of a new date for its execution, the identification of the likely occasion of its commission, and of the patron.

Identified as a *spalliera*, *Mars and Venus* is likely to have once constituted the high wooden back panel of a *lettuccio*. The painting would have suited the painted decoration of a couple's *camera* where it would have thematically matched other love-related depictions such as those of the *cassoni*. Investigation into the aspects of material culture in *Mars and Venus*, in fact, proved that the brooch and the cushion could have been intended as symbols of marriages and conjugal love. Similarly, the shell, the lance, the sword, the baby satyrs, and the squirting cucumber embodied a sexual symbolic value.

The occasion of the commission of *Mars and Venus* was identified as the wedding of Marco di Piero Vespucci and Costanza di Recco Capponi, celebrated in 1477. This shifted the conventional execution date of the panel to 1477-1478 from the 1480s, a change supported by the reconsideration of the stylistic aspects of the painting. Investigation has proved that images of reclined sleeping male figures derived from classical sources, which Botticelli was believed to have been inspired by during his stay in Rome in the 1480s, were widely employed in Florentine artistic production since the fourteenth-century. Taddeo Gaddi, Andrea Pisano, Luca della Robbia, Verrocchio, and Pollaiuolo were some of the artists who adapted the classical iconography of the male sleeping figure in the fourteenth and fifteenth century and imbued it with Christian and pagan meaning. The circulation of this iconography in Florentine workshops suggested that Botticelli had the chance to view motifs inspired by classical art before his journey to Rome.

The iconography and function of the panel as a marriage piece have led to a reconsideration of the meaning of *Mars and Venus*. Moving away from Neoplatonic

interpretations of the panel, attention was directed to Renaissance vernacular poetry. The literary conventions of Petrarch and Poliziano on the description of lovers found a visual expression in Botticelli's *Venus* who, represented with blonde hair, rosy cheeks, and pale skin, followed the features of the idealised female form. At the same time, Renaissance epithalamia, stressing the earthly value of Venus, could have been another possible source for Botticelli. Such poems and writings were generally evoked in relation to marriage and sensual pleasure, themes directly addressed by Botticelli in this panel. *Mars and Venus* is thus the complex result derived from the overlapping of multiple textual and visual sources. Stressing the idea of carnal and epithalamial love, the panel fit into the Florentine visual tradition of producing marriage pieces with the intention of arousing the newly married couple, enabling a fertile marriage and the continuation of the line.

The evidence suggested Piero di Giuliano Vespucci as the patron of *Mars and Venus*. Closely connected to the Medici and their entourage he was acquainted with those personalities who fuelled Florence's intellectual culture. Piero Vespucci was a friend of Luigi Pulci; a copy of whom *Sonnetti* was also in his possession. Aware of fifteenth-century poetic output, it is certainly possible that Piero commissioned *Mars and Venus*. The presence of the lance and the helmet in *Mars and Venus* can also establish a link to the *equus* Piero, alluding to his participation as a knight in the Medici's jousts and games. Embedded in the cultural and intellectual climate of fifteenth-century Florence, the panel's iconography is at the same time connected to antiquity and chivalric ideals: figures taken from classic reliefs coexist with the female voyeuristic aspects characteristic of the knightly jousts.

Redated to 1477-1478, *Mars and Venus* must be considered the first painting by Botticelli commissioned by the Vespucci. The new date would make this panel the first mythological painting realised by the artist: preceding the execution of *The Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus*, and *Minerva and the Centaur*, all of which are dated between 1477 and 1485. As already discussed in relation to Ognissanti and Ghirlandaio, the Vespucci focused their attention on their young neighbour artist,

commissioning a painting that would have later inspired, in both style and meaning, the commission of similar artworks by the Medici and their kin. Through their artistic commissions – both secular and religious - between 1470-1480, the Vespucci positioned themselves as leading art patrons of Florence. They promoted the family, the neighbourhood, and new artists, and commissioned depictions that, close to the cultural dispositions of the ruling class, must have appeared striking and innovative for their style and iconography.

CHAPTER 5

The Vespucci property in via de' Servi: Patronage and politics in Republican Florence

In the last decade of the fifteenth century, Florence underwent a time of political, spiritual, and cultural changes. Following the downfall of the Medici regime, which culminated in the exile of Piero de' Medici in 1494, a new Republican government was established. Its legislative body, the Great Council, gave a broader range of citizens access to public offices, accentuating the rivalry between them and the old ruling elite.¹⁵⁰ Florence's population was divided not only by contrasting political interests, but also by religious feelings. The prophetic sermons of the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola saw his followers, the *frateschi* or *piagnoni*, lining-up against his enemies, the *arrabbiati*.¹⁵¹ The break with tradition and with the certainties built up under the Medici was further enhanced by the expansion of the known world through the travels of Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci. The interplay of geographical discoveries, political changes, and spiritual fervour generated an unstable situation in Florence which resulted in the settings of new artistic trends and cultural interests. The latter revolved around Lorenzo di Piefrancesco de' Medici, a key figure of this period. After having been exiled from Florence with his brother Giovanni due to the accusation of conspiring against the Medici government, he returned to Florence after Piero de' Medici's expulsion, becoming one of the leading political personalities of the last decade of the Quattrocento.¹⁵²

What was the Vespucci's political, cultural, and religious position in the 1490s? Did the family unity and collaboration persist throughout the last decade of

¹⁵⁰ For an overview of the political changes Florence underwent in the 1490s: GILBERT 1965, 7-104; BUTTERS 1985, 1-46.

¹⁵¹ On Savonarola: WEINSTEIN 1970, 112-184; POLIZZOTTO 1994, 8-53; DALL'AGLIO 2010, 13-44.

¹⁵² BROWN 1979, 101-102.

the Quattrocento? Was the family able to maintain its prominent role within the city even after the Medici expulsion? As seen in the previous chapters, the Vespucci were close to both Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, Giorgio Antonio being his personal tutor, and the members of the main branch of the Medici. Whose side did the Vespucci take and how did the relationship with the Medici change? Understanding the political and cultural position of the family, as well as the nature of the relationship between its members, paves the way towards the comprehension of the Vespucci's artistic patronage. In these years the family acquired the property in via de' Servi and commissioned two painted cycles from Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo. Focussing on this commission, the aims of this chapter are threefold. First, it is to offer a comprehensive examination of the house in via de' Servi and provide evidence to establish a secure connection between the Vespucci, the building, and the painted cycles. The second is to shed light on the Vespucci's political, cultural, and spiritual role in the city after the expulsion of the Medici. The third is to show how the unsettling events of the 1490s contributed to shape the family's identity and artistic taste.

The history of the Vespucci property in via de' Servi during the fifteenth century has been neglected by scholars. Today called Palazzo Incontri (Figure 26), from the surname of the family who owned it in the seventeenth century, the building that stands on the site of the former Vespucci property does not retain any features of the original structure. Placed at the corner between via de' Servi and via de' Pucci, metres from Florence's cathedral, it was handed down to several families throughout the centuries and subsequently altered. Palazzo Incontri has featured in three studies: in 1907 Guido Carocci outlined the history from 1427 to the present day; he was followed by Leonardo Ginori Lisci who included Palazzo Incontri in his large publication on Florence's palaces published in 1972; in 2007 a monograph about the palace was published by the Banca CR of Florence.¹⁵³ This book devotes

¹⁵³ CAROCCI 1907, 109-110; GINORI LISCI 1972, 427. Edited by Emanuele Barletti, under the guidance of Mina Gregori, the publication on Palazzo Incontri comprises of several contributions on the history, architecture, and painted spaces of the building. The study that the present chapter will mainly consider is: CALAFATI 2007, 79-99.

its attention to the period spanning the late sixteenth and the seventeenth-century, and focuses on the phases that contributed to give the palace its modern appearance. The research undertaken on the building did not focus on the previous centuries, and I believe that the reason for this lacuna is twofold. Firstly, it was difficult to retrieve information on the history of the building and the Vespucci in the fifteenth century. Secondly, the CR bank who sponsored the book on Palazzo Incontri was interested in highlighting the history and architectural changes that, having modified the features of the original structure, brought to the construction of the modern building where the bank's offices are today located.¹⁵⁴

Art historians have also failed to provide relevant information on the Vespucci building along via de' Servi despite the interest that Vasari's *Lives* provoked. The artist recounted his visit to the property that had once belonged to the Vespucci, and stated that two rooms of the house were decorated by paintings of Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo respectively.¹⁵⁵ Following Vasari's description, scholars have identified and discussed four panels likely to have been included in the painted cycles described by Vasari: Botticelli's *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia*; and Piero di Cosimo's *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus*.¹⁵⁶ Although the name of Guidoantonio Vespucci as the possible patron of the works was singled out, the paintings have not been correctly interpreted in light of the Vespucci family's history, leading to a misinterpretation of the panels.¹⁵⁷

Building upon previous studies, the first section of this chapter will bring together overlooked archival evidence to provide new information on the architecture and history of the Vespucci property during the fifteenth century. New

¹⁵⁴ The building today hosts the offices of the Banca Cassa di Risparmio while the top floor has been transformed into small holiday apartments to be rented out.

¹⁵⁵ VASARI 1967, vol 3, 196, 450.

¹⁵⁶ For Botticelli's panels: HENDY 1974, 38-41; LIGHTBOWN 1978, 101-106; BASKINS 1998, 128-159; ETTLINGER 1996, 116; RIGON 2000, 150-157; CECCHI 2005, 341; ACIDINI LUCHINAT 2010, 20; DI LORENZO 2010, 74-79; PAOLINI et al. 2010, 194-197; RODESCHINI 2012, 30-35. For Piero di Cosimo's panels: PANOFKY 1937, 24; DOUGLAS 1945, 137; BACCI 1976, 93; FERMOR 1993, 85-86; FORLANI TEMPESTI and CAPRETTI 1996, 124; GINZBURG 2005, 126; GERONIMUS 2006, 100-101; ACIDINI 2010, 22-23; GERONIMUS 2012, 156; PADOVANI 2013, 18-32.

¹⁵⁷ For Botticelli's paintings see in particular: PAOLINI et al. 2010, 194-197; RODESCHINI 2012, 30-35. For Piero di Cosimo's panels: GERONIMUS 2006, 100-101.

considerations on the building will challenge the common '*palazzo*' definition with which the property has generally been labeled. Other aspects that will be taken into account are the name of the family member responsible for the purchase of the building; the acquisition date; and the reasons that lay behind the investment. This will further the examination of the position the Vespucci assumed after the expulsion of the Medici from Florence in 1494. The second section of the chapter will illustrate the complex family dynamics in the 1490s and the alliances the family established in the city after the downfall of the Medici.

The understanding of the political and cultural context will lead to a discussion of how these changes affected the Vespucci's private patronage. A multi-layered approach will inform the reconstruction of Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo's panels in the third and fourth section of the chapter. Although both cycles present elements that link them to the idea of family, wedding, and procreation, they also require consideration within a wider context, notably to the dramatic events of Florence in the last decade of the Quattrocento. Can *The Story of Lucretia* and *The Story of Virginia*, which refer to the end of cruel and violent ruling governments in ancient Rome, find a parallel in the difficult situation Florence was in the 1490s? Can the primitive looking men of *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus* be considered the visual representation of the encounter with the wild Other produced by the transatlantic journeys, and the expression of the tension that historical events generated in Florence and, more generally, Europe?¹⁵⁸ Unlike other studies that have examined Piero di Cosimo and Botticelli's cycles separately, this chapter will analyse them together as part of the same interior decoration and commissions of the same patron.¹⁵⁹ Is it possible to establish a link between these two decorations, apparently so different? What is their meaning? Who commissioned them? The final section will be devoted to Filippino Lippi's *Erato*, also believed to be a Vespucci commission.

¹⁵⁸ For the connection between Piero di Cosimo's panels and the representations of the inhabitants of the New World see: GERONIMUS 2006, 132-134; BROWN 2010, 89-90.

¹⁵⁹ See p. 190 n. 7.

1. A *palazzo*? History and architecture of the property in via de' Servi. From the Medici to the Salviati through the Vespucci.

In his study of Palazzo Incontri, Calafati briefly outlined the history of the building, focussing on the architectural changes of the structure in the seventeenth century, when the Incontri family purchased the property. The author dedicated only a few lines to the history and architectural features of the building during the fifteenth century, asserting that no information survived on the palace at the time of the Vespucci.¹⁶⁰ The information provided on the Quattrocento, however, was taken from the study of Florentine palaces undertaken by Leonardo Ginori Lisci in the 1970s, and no additional investigation was carried out by Calafati on the pre-existence of the building during the fifteenth century.¹⁶¹ Summing up previous literature, Calafati records Palazzo Incontri opposite the church of San Michele Visdomini, between via de' Servi and via de' Pucci in the corner known as *Canto di Balla*.¹⁶² Located in the central *quartiere* of San Giovanni, this was the area where many wealthy Florentine families chose to settle, several Medici allies among them. Since the beginning of the fifteenth century, in fact, the Medici started to dominate the *quartiere* of San Giovanni: the studies of Caroline Elam have shown that the ancestors of Cosimo de' Medici moved there in the fourteenth century and that with Cosimo de' Medici and Lorenzo il Magnifico the family consolidated its patronage and power in the area. By the fifteenth century the Medici were closely connected with the *quartiere* of San Giovanni and, with their family palace along via Larga (in the *gonfalone* of the Leon d'Oro), they transformed the *quartiere* of San Giovanni into their stronghold.¹⁶³

Several Medici houses were also positioned along via de' Servi. As Guido Carocci demonstrated, Averardo di Francesco de' Medici, Cosimo de' Medici's cousin, in the *catasto* of 1427 declared possession of houses opposite the church of

¹⁶⁰ CALAFATI 2007, 79-99. See in particular pp. 79-80 for information regarding the history of the building in the fifteenth century.

¹⁶¹ GINORI LISCI 1972, 427.

¹⁶² GINORI LISCI 1972, 427; CALAFATI 2007, 80.

¹⁶³ ELAM 1990, 44-53; ELAM 1992, 362-363. For the social transformations of the *gonfalone* in the sixteenth century: SODINI 1979, 5-8.

San Michele Visdomini, which corresponds to the modern position of Palazzo Incontri.¹⁶⁴ The Vespucci property, therefore, was a former Medici possession that, from Averardo di Francesco, passed to Piero the Gouty in 1469. According to his *portata*, the property consisted of three *cassette allato* where Piero's brother Carlo, Mona Giovanna, and Manetto lived.¹⁶⁵ According to Calafati, the succession history of the properties after 1469 is unknown, but towards the end of the century the Vespucci became the owners of the building, which they then sold to the Salviati in 1533, as is recorded in the *Decima Granducale* of 1551.¹⁶⁶ Among the Vespucci family's members Giovanni Antonio Vespucci was the one singled out by Calafati as the buyer of the property in via de' Servi. This identification is problematic, however, as no family member named Giovanni Antonio existed. It, in fact, seems to come from the mix of 'Guidoantonio' and 'Giovanni'. The root of this mistake seems to lie in the transcription of the Salviati's *Decima Granducale* of 1551.¹⁶⁷ The name written, 'Guidoantonio', is transcribed as 'Giovanni Antonio' by Ginori Lisci and Calafati.¹⁶⁸ The authors were probably influenced by Vasari who remembered seeing painted cycles of Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo in the house that once belonged to Giovanni Vespucci.¹⁶⁹

My archival investigations on the form and ownership of the *palazzo* Vespucci add new information to the palace's complex history, building on the initial data provided by Ginori Lisci and recently re-published by Calafati. The

¹⁶⁴ CAROCCI 1907, 109-110.

¹⁶⁵ 'Una casa, e per l'addentro erano tre cassette allato che ci pervennero dall'erede di Francesco di Giuliano di Averardo de Medici, sul Canto di Balla, rimpetto a San Michele Visdomini. Vi abita Messer Carlo mio fratello e ne ha fatto una casa grande o delle tre una. E nell'ultima vi sta Mona Giovanna madre che fu di Guerrino non legittimo figliolo di Lorenzo mio zio. L'altra abita Manetto figlio illegittimo di Averardo de Medici', CAROCCI 1907, 109.

¹⁶⁶ CALAFATI 2007, 80.

¹⁶⁷ 'Una casa nel popolo S. Michele [...] Visdomini [...] la quale casa compro detto Piero per fa da rede a messer Guidoantonio Vespucci e la detta casa [...] contratto rogato Ser Pier Francesco Machalli sotto dì 6 marzo 1532 con carico di dover pagare per causa della casa allo Spedale degli Innocenti scudi 11 [...] l'anno [...] per testamento di Messer Guidoantonio Vespucci rogato Ser Francesco del Facchino al 4 Maggio 1498 e quali scudi 160 pagò detto Piero al detto spedale sotto dì 14 maggio 1547 [...] E detti beni sono alla 98 a.c. 548 sotto nome di Messer Guidoantonio Vespucci ad Decime di 11 [...]', ASF Decima Granducale, 2260 (1551), Santa Croce, Arroto 117, f. 3r.

¹⁶⁸ GINORI LISCI 1972, 427; CALAFATI 2007, 97 n. 18.

¹⁶⁹ VASARI 1967, vol. 3, 196, 450.

documentation retrieved, spanning the years 1469-1534, enable a partial reconstruction of the history of the building under the Vespucci and a better understanding of its architectural features in the Quattrocento. The material gathered also allows us to answer questions previously left open by scholars: when did the Vespucci purchase the building? Which family member acquired it? Who lived there?

As recounted in Chapter 1 and 2, documents related to the Vespucci family are to be found in volume 709 of the Gherardi Piccolomini *fondo*. Among the various *folios*, ff. 43r-v concerns the property along via de' Servi. Dated 22 January 1496, the paper is a copy of a document that records the alienation of the house along via de' Servi which was passed on from Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, future Leo X, to Giovanni Tornabuoni and his son Lorenzo.¹⁷⁰ A note added to the document attests that the building was the same that later entered the Vespucci possessions and of which a brief description is offered: the house featured vaults, halls, bedrooms, wells, a kitchen, and other unspecified buildings.¹⁷¹ Despite being incomplete, as missing parts at the end of the *verso* suggest, the document provides an important - and previously unknown - detail: the building was still a Medici property in 1496. In the *Decima Granducale* of Namiciana Nerli, widow of Giovanni Vespucci, it is also recorded the houses bought by the Vespucci had once belonged to Lorenzo il Magnifico.¹⁷² It could therefore be assumed that the property on via de' Servi entered the possession of Giovanni de' Medici in 1492 at the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico. Secondly, that before entering Vespucci's possession the building belonged to the Tornabuoni family.

¹⁷⁰ 'Cessione fatta dal cardinal Giovanni di Lorenzo de Medici a favore di Giovanni di Francesco Tornaboni e di Lorenzo di lui figliolo sopra la terza parte di alcuni beni che dovrebbero esser descritti in questo instrumento ma che non vi sono effettivamente descritti [...]', ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, ff. 43r-v. The document is dated 22 Gennaio 1496. It is a copy of the original that is not contained in the same volume. The name of the notary Pier di Ser Bruno Corbolani corresponds to a Florentine notary whose registers are kept at the ASF. It was however not possible to locate the original document among his papers in ASF, NA 5675 [Pier di Ser Bruno Corbolani 1490-1500]. On Giovanni de' Medici: ARRIGHI 2013, 45-57; BALDINI 2013, 103-111.

¹⁷¹ 'una casa con volte sotto terra, sale e camere, pozzi, cucina e con altri suoi edifizii', ASF, Gherardi Piccolomini, 709, f. 43v.

¹⁷² ASF, Decima Granducale, San Giovanni, San Michele Visdomini, 3612 (1534), ff. 138v-140r.

When did the Vespucci purchase the building? The academic publications that focused on the painted cycles that Piero di Cosimo and Botticelli executed for via de' Servi variously recorded that the property entered Vespucci's ownership in 1498 and 1499.¹⁷³ The *portata* of the *Decima Repubblicana* submitted by Guidoantonio Vespucci presents an additional part written by the officials of the *catasto* that records that Guidoantonio bought the house in via de' Servi on 5 March 1498 (Florentine calendar).¹⁷⁴ Further information is also provided in the *Decima Granducale* submitted in 1534 by Nanna, the widow of Giovanni di Guidoantonio. Among the *beni alienati* featured two houses both acquired by Guidoantonio Vespucci in 1498 through a contract drawn up by Michele da Santa Croce.¹⁷⁵ The protocols of the notary Michele da Santa Croce spanning the years 1498-1499 were consulted, but I could find no documentation related to the Vespucci acquisition.¹⁷⁶

A final issue needs to be taken into consideration. The annotations of the *Decima Repubblicana* and *Granducale* report that Guidoantonio purchased the building from the Arte del Cambio (where Michele da Santa Croce presumably worked as a notary) and not from the Tornabuoni.¹⁷⁷ A passage seems to be missing: how and when did the palace enter into the hands of the Arte del Cambio? It is possible that the passage from the Tornabuoni to the Arte happened in 1497. In this year Giovanni Tornabuoni died and Lorenzo Tornabuoni was imprisoned, accused of having conspired against the Florentine Republic for the return of the

¹⁷³ 1498: WACKERNAGEL 1981, 275; CECCHI 2005, 365 note 163. 1499: DAVIES 1951, 77-78; FAHY 1965, 202; DAVIES 1974, 437-438; BACCI 1976, 93; CECCHI 2005, 342; GERONIMUS 2006, 100; CECCHI 2011, 216; RIGON 2000, 153.

¹⁷⁴ 'Una casa posta nel popolo di S. Michele Visdomini comprò dall'Arte del Cambio [...] Marzo [...] 1498', ASF, Decima Repubblicana, Unicorno, 20 (1498), ff. 550r.

¹⁷⁵ '[...] una casa posta nella via de' Calderai nel popolo san Michele Visdomini [...] la quale [...] comperò Messer Guidoantonio Vespucci l'anno 98 dall'Arte del Cambio Ser Michele da Santa Croce[...] Una casa posta [...] via de' Calderai [...] de beni che furono di Lorenzo de' Medici la quale [...] e quella sopra abbiamo venduta a Piero d'Alemanno Salviati l'anno 1533', ASF, Decima Granducale, San Giovanni, San Michele Visdomini, 3612 (1534), ff. 138v-140r.

¹⁷⁶ ASF, NA, Michele di Antonio di Piero da Santa Croce 13960 (1494-1498) and 13961 (1499-1504).

¹⁷⁷ Michele da Santa Croce is the notary of a document drawn up in 1496 for the Arte del Cambio: ASF, Archivi delle Arti, del Disegno e della Camera di Commercio. Arte del Cambio, filza 104, f. 27r.

Medici.¹⁷⁸ These two important moments led to the downfall of the family and it is possible that their goods were at this time sold or confiscated by the Ufficiali dei Ribelli: the house in via de' Servi might have then been acquired by the Arte del Cambio before passing into the Vespucci possessions.¹⁷⁹

The evidence gathered proves that Guidoantonio purchased the former Medici property in 1499, but a question still remains to be answered: who were the houses for? Relying on the information provided by Vasari – who linked Palazzo Incontri to Giovanni Vespucci – art historians have often stressed that the cycles by Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo were commissioned for the wedding of Giovanni di Guidoantonio and Namiciana di Benedetto di Tanai Nerli, implying that Guidoantonio purchased the building for his son.¹⁸⁰ The chronicler Iacopo Nardi, however, suggests that Guidoantonio was living in via de' Servi. In his *Istorie della città di Firenze*, written in 1553 and focussing on the history of Florence between 1494 and 1538, Nardi recounted the events that followed the appointment of Guidoantonio Vespucci as *gonfaloniere* in 1498.¹⁸¹ According to the writer, Florence's youth rose up in front of Guidoantonio's house after he suggested increasing the pay of Florentine soldiers while the population was going through a period of economic crisis. The information provided by Nardi is extremely interesting: the chronicler reports that the property where the Vespucci was living was located along via de' Servi, and that the rioters gathered under the windows of the house's *camere terrene*. According to Nardi, therefore, Guidoantonio was living in via de' Servi by November 1498. The indication provided in the *Istorie* is easily

¹⁷⁸ PLEBANI 2002, 78.

¹⁷⁹ I am grateful to Eleonora Plebani who helped me reconstructing the possible reasons behind the passage of the property from the Tornabuoni family to the Arte del Cambio. No documents related to the Vespucci property could be found in the surviving *filze* of the Arte del Cambio nor in the inventory of the Tornabuoni family drew up in 1497: ASF, Archivi delle Arti, del Disegno e della Camera di Commercio. Arte del Cambio, *filze* 66, 102, 104; ASF, Magistrato dei Pupilli avanti il Principato, 181, ff. 141r-150r.

¹⁸⁰ For a summary of the previous literature: GERONIMUS 2006, 100-101.

¹⁸¹ 'Ed il gonfaloniere se n'andò la sera medesima a casa con la febbre. Ma la seguente notte non si astenne la temeraria gioventù d'appicare più mazze di capestri a' ferri delle finestre delle camere terrene e alla campanella della porta di casa, che egli abitava nella via de' Servi dirimpetto alla chiesa di San Michele Visdomini e con alta voce gridare d'intorno alla casa: O Zucchetto, e ti sarà tolta la forma della berretta, alludendo alla figura della testa di quello, perciò che egli era di sua natura calvo', NARDI 1842, 189-191.

verifiable: as stated in the *Decima Repubblicana* mentioned above, the house was purchased on 5 March 1498 and Guidoantonio became *gonfaloniere* on 3 November 1498.

Guidoantonio's will, furthermore, proves that the property (or part of it) was in his possession, as he bequeathed one apartment to his niece, Antonia, daughter of his brother Simone and wife of Antonio Strozzi. The will offers a short description of the part left to Antonia: it comprised of a bedroom located on the first floor and overlooking via de' Pucci, a kitchen, and a cellar to store wood and wine.¹⁸² From this scattered description it is difficult to get a sense of how many parts the building consisted. It is possible that by the time the Vespucci acquired the property, two houses next to each other existed, one which belonged to Guidoantonio - later on bequeathed to his niece Antonia - and one to Giovanni and his wife Namiciana.

The building remained a Vespucci possession until 1532 when Giovanni's daughters and widow arranged to have it sold to the Salviati family.¹⁸³ Once again it is the *Decima Granducale* of 1551 belonging to the Salviati family that provides information about this. The notary who drew up the contract through which the Vespucci were selling the property to the Salviati, is said by Calafati to have been Ser Pier Francesco Machalli. Although the name recorded in the *Decima* does not correspond to any Florentine notary, it was possible to identify the correct name in Pier Francesco Maccari. The correct name features in the copies of some Vespucci testaments included in the 709 Gherardi Piccolomini and in the Carte Strozzi. The vast amount of archival evidence that links the Vespucci to Maccari suggests that he was one of the notaries employed by the family during the first few decades of the sixteenth-century.¹⁸⁴ The documents retrieved in the notary registers in the

¹⁸² 'camera che era al primo palco in via de' Pucci con la parte superiore di detta camera e con una cucina che [...] e con la parte superiore di detta cucina e con una parte di cantina per potervi tenere il vino e la legna', ASF, NA 12702 [Giovanni di Guido Manetti 1487-1506], ff. 14r-15v.

¹⁸³ It is not clear what happened to the part of the house that Guidoantonio bequeathed to his niece Antonia. The building, in fact, it is not mentioned in Antonia's will of 1527. ASF, C. Strozzi., s. III, 122, ff. 161r-164v (original document is in ASF, NA 12474 [Pier Francesco Maccari 1532-1533], f. 21r).

¹⁸⁴ The documents that Pier Francesco Maccari drew up for the Vespucci family included the wills of Bernardo di Benedetto Vespucci, Antonia di Simone Vespucci, Piero di Simone Vespucci, and Ginevra

Archivio di Stato also feature the Vespucci-Salviati contract for the property along via de' Servi.¹⁸⁵ The history of the building in the following years is known due to previous studies and archival documents. Piero Salviati bequeathed the house to his widow Ginevra Bartolini Salimbeni and, at her death, it was inherited by her daughter Maddalena Ridolfi in 1573. Piero Ridolfi's son Cosimo later sold the property to the Baglioni family, from whom it passed, in 1676, to Lodovico Incontri through the Monte Comune. It was at this time that the original houses were transformed into the present Palazzo Incontri.¹⁸⁶

According to the brief surviving descriptions, the structure comprised of a *camera terrena*, a kitchen, a *sala*, wells, a basement with vaults, a cellar to store wine and wood, and other unspecified buildings. The Vespucci's house does not seem to have differed from the properties of other wealthy families in Florence. The Medici, Strozzi, and Tornabuoni owned properties that comprised of similar rooms.¹⁸⁷ The *camere terrene*, in particular, seem to have been a typical architectural feature of Florentine properties. The studies of Brenda Preyer, James Lindow, and Maria DePrano identified several purposes that ground-floor chambers fulfilled, such as meeting points for clients and guests, bedrooms for important visitors, and leisure rooms where musical instruments, arms, games, and paintings were displayed to entertain small groups of friends.¹⁸⁸ The lack of inventories prevents us knowing what was kept in the ground chambers of the Vespucci property and to advance any secure hypothesis on their use. Nonetheless, the various descriptions of the building show that the interior of the Vespucci house conformed to that of the elite families of Florence, suggesting not only the

di Battista Vespucci (ASF, NA 12474 [Pier Francesco Maccari 1532-1533] and 12483 [Pier Francesco Maccari 1522-1545]).

¹⁸⁵ ASF, NA, 12474 [Pier Francesco Maccari 1532-1533], f.197.

¹⁸⁶ GERONIMUS 2006, 310 n. 151; CALAFATI 2007, 79-99.

¹⁸⁷ For the descriptions of Palazzo Strozzi, Palazzo Medici, Palazzo Tornabuoni and other Florentine houses: BULST 1990, 99; PREYER 2006, 34-49; MUSACCHIO 2008, 62-121; DEPRANO 2013, 127-142. For the general features of Florentine *palazzo* and their structure: GURRIERI and FABBRI 1996, 12-39. For the presence of wells in Florentine properties: PAOLINI 2004b, 23-24.

¹⁸⁸ PREYER 2006, 36; LINDOW 2007, 123-124; DEPRANO 2013, 127-142.

Vespucci's social status, but also the way in which the family aimed to be perceived in the city after the Medici exile, as I will explain in the final section of this chapter.

The extant descriptions of the house in via de' Servi seem to challenge the conventional terminology adopted for the building, usually labeled as a *palazzo*. The presence of words such as *casa*, *cassette*, *domus magna* and *edifici*, gives the impression that what today looks like an imposing palace, was originally a conglomeration of several houses.¹⁸⁹ Calafati argued that the property was transformed into a 'palazzotto' in 1469 when it passed to Carlo de' Medici, stepbrother of Piero the Gouty.¹⁹⁰ The author sought to find evidence of this change in the map of Florence engraved by Stefano Bonsignori in 1584 where the pre-existences of the future Palazzo Incontri can be seen (Figure 118). The building engraved by Bonsignori, however, largely differs from the other *palazzi* in the map. What is represented at the corner between via de' Pucci and via de' Servi, standing opposite the church of San Michele Visdomini, appears to be a conglomeration of disjointed houses rather than a coherent *palazzo* structure (Figure 119). The terminology adopted to describe the building in archival documentation does not help explain the nature of the Vespucci property. The *catasto's* submissions specifically referred to *casa* and *cassette* and Guidoantonio's will and the Vespucci-Salviati contract mentioned the presence of a *domus*. According to Wolfer Bulst, *casa* was generally used to indicate a private residence while the word *palazzo* described public buildings such as Palazzo Vecchio, the headquarters of the government. These definitions, however, often overlapped and, for instance, Vasari used these terms interchangeably when referring to the Medici Palace.¹⁹¹ From the surviving descriptions and the representation of the Vespucci building in the Bonsignori map, it seems that Guidoantonio's property could not be considered a *palazzo* but, rather, a complex of at least two houses. Although the *domus magna* might have communicated a sense of grandeur and dignity, the building was

¹⁸⁹ The Medici portata of 1469 recorded 'una casa, e per l'addentro erano tre cassette allato'; the Medici-Tornabuoni document of 1496 recorded 'una casa con volte sotto terra, sale e camera, pozzi, cucina e con altri suoi edificii'; while the Vespucci-Salviati contract of 1532 'una domus magna'.

¹⁹⁰ CALAFATI 2007, 80.

¹⁹¹ BULST 1990, 98-99.

probably far from the magnificence of those belonging to the Medici, Strozzi, Rucellai, and Tornabuoni that, with their scale and fortress-like facades, conveyed permanence and wealth to their *gonfalone*.¹⁹²

Further features of the Vespucci property seem significant, but due to the lack of archival documentation, they can only be surmised. The reconstruction of the building under the Incontri left no sign of how the palazzo looked before. This prevents us from understanding the impact the Vespucci had in the *gonfalone* through the acquisition of a former Medici property. Information on the architecture of the building and its façade would have been of particular interest: did they undertake construction works to embellish the property? Did the Vespucci place a coat of arms on the façade of their new building? The family emblem would have stressed the presence of the Vespucci in the area, creating a ‘new identity’ for the building, that of the house of Guidoantonio Vespucci, *gonfaloniere* in 1498. Knowing whether a family coat of arms was in place on the façade would also allow us to speculate over the relationship between the interior and exterior of the building. James Lindow noticed that in the Medici palace there was an idea of continuity between the exterior and the interior due to the employment of specific decorative elements such as applied or frescoed heraldic devices.¹⁹³ Could this also have been the case for the Vespucci? The use of wasps for internal and external spaces was employed for the Villa la Sfacciata, the property that, as seen in Chapter 2, the Vespucci possessed in Florence’s countryside. Here wasps could be found on the coat of arms placed above the main entrance of the villa (Figure 15), as well as frescoed in the decorative motives of the main *salone*. As I shall discuss later, the presence of flying stripy insects in Piero di Cosimo’s *The Discovery of Honey* is commonly interpreted as a reference to the family coat of arms. The presence of wasp-like symbols on the façade of the building would, therefore, have stressed the identity of the family living in the property.

¹⁹² For the intertwined concepts of architecture, splendour and magnificence: LINDOW 2007, 43-76.

¹⁹³ LINDOW 2007, 82-83.

2. Statecraft and family dynamics

Having asserted that Guidoantonio purchased the property in via de' Servi, we should now turn our attention to the reasons that prompted him to make this investment. Although the desire to expand the family's power across the *quartiere* of San Giovanni could be taken as a valid explanation, the complicated political situation of Florence calls for deeper investigation. As seen in Chapter 1, in the period between 1470-1480 Guidoantonio was a close friend of Lorenzo il Magnifico who sent him on ambassadorial missions to France and Rome as a representative of the Florentine republic. After Lorenzo's death, however, Guidoantonio is to be found, together with other former Medici partisans, among the protagonists of the chain of events that lead to the Medici exile and the creation of the Great Council. Guidoantonio is remembered for having subtly, but firmly, criticised Piero de' Medici's opinion in a debate over the two Lunigiana towns that wanted Florence's protection.¹⁹⁴ In the same years, Guidoantonio became a close friend to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, associated with the republican opposition group. By May 1499 citizens such as Guidoantonio Vespucci, Bernardo Rucellai, Paolantonio Soderini, and Gianbattista Ridolfi discussed joining forces behind the leadership of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, the so-called *popolano*.¹⁹⁵ The fact that many former supporters of Lorenzo il Magnifico sided with Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco brought Gombrich to wonder whether these alliances had secretly started to form while il Magnifico was still alive.¹⁹⁶ I shall return to this aspect later.

In the same years, from 1497 to 1499, Guidoantonio became one of the ambassadors of the Signoria, as written commands of the government (or *mandata*) retrieved from the Archivio di Stato prove.¹⁹⁷ The studies of Florentine lawyers and Renaissance ambassadors showed that these powerful personalities belonged to the highest rank of society. Doctors of law and men of letters, taste, and erudition,

¹⁹⁴ While Piero de' Medici wanted to delay an immediate decision, Guidoantonio Vespucci asserted that the towns had to be accepted at all cost, BROWN 2011, 78-79.

¹⁹⁵ WEINSTEIN 1970, 320; MARTINES 2006, 78-79, 180.

¹⁹⁶ GOMBRICH 1972, 65.

¹⁹⁷ ASF, Signori. Legazioni, commissarie, istruzioni, lettere 23, ff. 17r-19r; 24v-26r.

they not only exerted legislative power, but cultivated connections with scholars and artists.¹⁹⁸ The *mandata*, together with Guidoantonio's correspondence addressed to the Signoria, are an invaluable source for shedding light on his diplomatic role across the northern cities of the peninsula. In those years Guidoantonio acted both as a special and resident ambassador, travelling and staying in the courts of the Duke of Milan, of Giovanni II Bentivoglio in Bologna, and in the city of Venice.¹⁹⁹ The documents provide information on the cities Guidoantonio visited, the names of the orators who accompanied him in the missions, the personalities he met, and the position Florence assumed towards the other Italian cities. The precise instructions the Florentine ambassadors received through the *mandata* suggest Guidoantonio was collaborating with the Signoria to promote the cause of the regime that sought the expulsion of the Medici from Florence.

Guidoantonio's political position was, however, more complicated than the archival material suggests. In his study of Florentine lawyers in the Renaissance, Martines outlined the activity of Guidoantonio and other prominent lawyers at the end of the Quattrocento.²⁰⁰ What emerges suggests that Guidoantonio was not, in reality, a supporter of the Signoria and its Great Council. Part of the old Laurentian ruling group, he set himself against minor families of more modest means who joined the Great Council despite their limited experience of public affairs. Hated and feared by shopkeepers and minor merchants, Guidoantonio believed that government was best managed when controlled by the few and he sought to form a small group of people who came from the elite families of Florence, who could rule Florence together. He was, in other words, a supporter of an oligarchic republic.

¹⁹⁸ For brief but informative descriptions of the characteristic features of Renaissance ambassadors and their daily activities: MATTINGLY 1955, 109-111; NORTH 2002, 29-33; LAZZARINI 2012, 436-439. For examples on the role of ambassadors as cultural agents: LEVIN 2005, 183-198. For episodes of ambassadors being closely involved with the arts in the fifteenth century: CAMPBELL 2002, 494; RICHARDSON 2007, 54; FURLOTTI 2008, 220. For a recent study on arts and diplomacy outside Florence: BAKER-BATES 2013, 51-72

¹⁹⁹ For the role of special and resident ambassadors: MATTINGLY 1955, 102-111; BIOW 2002, 101-152.

²⁰⁰ MARTINES 1968, 108, 395, 440-443.

Guidoantonio's political aspirations were shared by those who gathered around Lorenzo di Piefrancesco de' Medici and with whom Guidoantonio had a close relationship. The republic they sought would not have differed much from the Laurentian regime of the previous year, but it would not have included the Medici family, becoming an 'alter-Medici' oligarchy. This form of government would have also seen the abolition of the Great Council and the exclusion of the middle class from the exercise of political office. In the 1490s Guidoantonio consolidated friendship with those who shared similar aspirations such as, among others, Tanai de' Nerli.²⁰¹ The alliance was sealed in 1500 with the wedding of their son, Giovanni, and granddaughter, Namiciana.

If seen in this light, Guidoantonio's activity in the 1490s acquires a precise meaning. What did it mean for Guidoantonio to purchase the house in via the Servi and own a former Medici property? In the case of Francesco Nasi, who purchased Palazzo Mozzi located at Oltrarno near Ponte alle Grazie, Jill Burke noted that reasons of familial identity lay behind the acquisition of the property: the palace had an important role in the history of diplomacy and by making it his house Francesco was conveying importance to his role as an ambassador.²⁰² I believe that the reasons that brought Guidoantonio to acquire houses in the *quartiere* of San Giovanni stood in stark contrast with those that motivated Francesco Nasi. Guidoantonio was not driven by the desire to identify his political role with that of the Medici. Rather, his intentions would have been to differentiate himself from the recently expelled Medici whom he set himself against by strategically embracing 'popular' political positions. Taking over a former Medici property, symbolically eradicating their power from the city, would have consolidated his loyalty to the Signoria who in 1498, eight months after the purchase of the house, appointed him *gonfaloniere* for the second time. Similar reasons must have been behind the decision to permit Charles VIII to reside in the Palazzo Medici in 1494. During the brief time the French army occupied Florence, the King and his entourage dwelled

²⁰¹ MAGNI 1939, 189.

²⁰² BURKE 2004, 44.

in the Medici property on via Larga, lavishly refurbished for the occasion.²⁰³ The presence of Charles VIII in the former Medici stronghold, the removal of the Medici coat of arms from family palaces and public buildings, and the homage the Signoria paid to the King contributed to the destruction of any pro-Medici inclinations and the perception of the French King as the liberator of Florence.²⁰⁴

The strategic attitude adopted by Guidoantonio was not uncommon among Florentine citizens, but remarkable was the case of Bernardo Rucellai whose activity between the 1480s and 1490s closely resembles that of Guidoantonio. *Orator* with Guidoantonio in Venice, Bernardo Rucellai was depicted by Francesco Guicciardini as a restless man who could never accept any regime in the city of Florence.²⁰⁵ He was initially very close to the Medici family and Lorenzo il Magnifico, and was chosen from the inner circle of family and scholars to attend the dinner held for the Venetian ambassador in 1490. After Lorenzo's death, Bernardo attempted to restrain Piero de' Medici's power and placed himself against the family by marrying his daughter to a member of the Strozzi family, while his son Cosimo became an open supporter of Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de' Medici. Unhappy with the regime of Savonarola and Pier Soderini, Bernardo later retreated to his villa where he hosted literary discussions in his gardens, the Orti Oricellari.²⁰⁶ Among those who participated in the gatherings was Giovanni di Guidoantonio Vespucci who featured among the conspirators who planned the revolution against the republic and the expulsion of Pier Soderini.²⁰⁷ Giovanni Vespucci's alignment with the main branch of the Medici twisted once more the position of the family. The strategic positions assumed by Guidoantonio and his son Giovanni reveal how the Vespucci intended to preserve the family's power by keeping its members closely

²⁰³ GLENN and HUNISAK and TURNER 1988, 963, 968.

²⁰⁴ For the ornaments and decorative apparatus that enriched Florence for the entrance of Charles VIII in the city: BOROOK 1961, 106-122.

²⁰⁵ BROWN 2010, 97.

²⁰⁶ On Bernardo Rucellai: GILBERT 1949, 101-131; LUCARELLI 1979, 79-133; BARTOLI 1991, 7-12; BROWN 2010, 97.

²⁰⁷ BULLARD 1980, 63; COMANDUCCI 1999, 170.

involved in Florence's political events, by constantly challenging alliances and redefining friendships.

The uneven Vespucci family's alliances are even more evident when considering the activity of Guidoantonio and Giorgio Antonio in the last decade of the fifteenth century. While Guidoantonio openly positioned himself in the anti-Savonarola party, Giorgio Antonio stood on the opposite side, becoming a Dominican friar under Savonarola in 1497 and entering the convent of San Marco as a *Piagnone* in 1499.²⁰⁸ In the last years of the 1490s both Guidoantonio and Giorgio Antonio commissioned paintings from their artist neighbour Botticelli: *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia* for the property in via de' Servi, discussed below; and the decoration of the *Cappella della Misericordia* in Ognissanti. Information on the latter, first discussed by Ronald Lightbown, is given in Giorgio Antonio's will of 1499 (Appendix 2, Document 2, p. 282).²⁰⁹ The document records that scenes of the life of Dionysius the Areopagite, namely his conversion, baptism, and martyrdom, were to be painted on the empty arch above the *Cappella della Misericordia*. The document states that the fresco was to be completed before All Saints Day, on the 1st of November, and that Botticelli would have been paid twelve *fiorini larghi d'oro*. It is possible that this decoration, probably never executed or lost during the remodeling of Ognissanti in the sixteenth century, referred to Giorgio Antonio's new spiritual feeling: Dionysius the Areopagite was often mentioned in Savonarola's sermons, and it might not be a coincidence to find episodes of his life depicted in the chapel of one of Savonarola's followers.²¹⁰ It would, nonetheless, be interesting to undertake further analysis on the choice of this peculiar iconography, for which no terms of comparison seem to have existed in fifteenth-century Florence.

The different positions assumed by Guidoantonio and Giorgio Antonio do not imply a rift within the Vespucci family, but rather confirms what was discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Family members co-operated to maintain the family's balance

²⁰⁸ WEINSTEIN 1970, 243 n. 46; POLIZZOTTO 1994, 235; RAO 2006, 142.

²⁰⁹ Lightbown 1978, 129-130, 179.

²¹⁰ For Savonarola and Dionysius the Areopagite: LUBAC 2006, 482.

and influence within the civic realm of Florence. The Vespucci political diversification was not atypical but, as Lorenzo Polizzotto discussed in his study of Savonarola, numerous families of Florence such as the Soderini, Guidi, Strozzi, and Salviati, divided their loyalties: for every family with a friar in San Marco, there was an equal who joined forces with a different party.²¹¹ It should moreover be noted that Antonio di Nastagio Vespucci, nephew of Giorgio Antonio and already mentioned in the previous chapters, became the official notary of the Ufficio delle Tratte, one of the government bodies of the Great Council, in 1498.²¹²

This attests that the Vespucci, like other prominent families of Florence, ensured the presence of at least one family member in the principal, often opposite, factions of the city, strategically aiming for the survival of the lineage. When seen in this perspective, the position assumed by Guidoantonio Vespucci, described by Martines as a 'political tactician', appears clear: Guidoantonio seized the opportunities that the chain of events of the 1490s presented to him and, strategically playing along, he succeeded in maintaining his leading position within Florence.²¹³ As I shall discuss in the following sections, the paintings realised by Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo in via de' Servi acquire a new meaning when interpreted in light of the life, activity, and political aspirations of Guidoantonio, who should be identified as the family member who commissioned these paintings.

3. Piero di Cosimo's naked men, satyrs, and families. Fantastic monstrosities in the age of geographical discoveries

'For Giovanni Vespucci, who lived in a house now belonging to Piero Salviati, opposite to San Michele, in the via de' Servi, he executed some bacchanalian scenes, which are around an apartment; wherein he made such strange fauns, satyrs, sylvan gods, little boys and bacchanals, that it is a marvel to see the diversity of the bay

²¹¹ POLIZZOTTO 1994, 20.

²¹² BROWN 2011, 252.

²¹³ MARTINES 1968, 108.

*horses and garments, and the variety of the goatlike figures, and all with great grace and most vivid truth to nature. In one scene is Silenus riding on an ass, with many children some supporting him, and some giving him drink. And throughout the whole is a feeling of the joy of life, produced by the great genius of Piero’.*²¹⁴

This is the description that Vasari gave of the painting realised by Piero di Cosimo in one room of Vespucci property. When Vasari visited the property in the sixteenth-century, it belonged to the Salviati family. Two panels have been associated by scholars with Vasari’s description and therefore identified as being part of the Vespucci cycle: *The Discovery of Honey* (Figure 120) at the Worcester Art Museum, and *The Misfortune of Silenus* (Figure 121) at the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge. Fortunately some information survives regarding the provenance of these panels. The two paintings were still in place at least until 1584, when Vincenzo Borghini recorded them in the house of Giovanni del Vernio who was living in the former Vespucci property in via de’ Servi. After this, *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus* are recorded as in the hands of the Italian art dealer Giovanni Freppa just before 1851 and, subsequently, in the Sebright Collection. A nineteenth-century manuscript catalogue of this collection states that the two panels were ‘from Palazzo Ridolfi, Florence’.²¹⁵

It is not known how the panels reached England and the Sebright Collection, but it is possible that, with his connections to Italian and British connoisseurs, Freppa sold them to the collector Thomas Sebright. Very little information exists on Freppa and comprehensive studies on this figure have never been attempted. Details about his activity are scattered across a wide range of material variously referring to his workshop; his production of majolica; and his friendship with

²¹⁴ For the English translation: Davies 1974, 436. The original text reads as follows: ‘Lavorò per Giovanni Vespucci, che stava dirimpetto a San Michele della via de’ Servi, oggi di Pier Salviati, alcune storie bacchanarie che sono intorno ad una camera, nelle quale fece sì strani fauni, satiri e silvani e putti e baccanti, che è una meraviglia a vedere la diversità de’ zaini e delle vesti e la varietà delle cere caprine, con una grazia et imitazione verissima. Evvi in una storia Sileno a cavallo su un asino con molti fanciulli, chi lo regge e chi gli dà bere, e si vede una letizia al vivo fatta con grande ingegno’, VASARI 1967, vol. 3, 450.

²¹⁵ DAVIES 1974, 435-440.

wealthy families with whom he had worked as an art adviser.²¹⁶ Among these personalities was Eleonora Nencini Pandolfini, daughter of Agnolo Pandolfini and Maria Teresa Incontri. The Pandolfini-Incontri possessed two properties in Florence: a palace in via San Gallo and another one in via de' Servi, namely the former Vespucci property.²¹⁷ As the studies carried out on Eleonora and Freppa seem to suggest that they knew each other, is it possible that the Pandolfini-Incontri sold Piero di Cosimo's panels to Freppa? Does the dismantling of the cycle need to be looked for in the nineteenth century?²¹⁸ The *fondo* Manoscritti of the Biblioteca Nazionale of Florence preserves the inventory of the statues, paintings and furniture found in both Palazzo Incontri and the Palazzo of via San Gallo after the death of Eleonora Pandolfini's father, Agnolo Pandolfini.²¹⁹ While some parts of the inventories are extremely precise, providing the subject of the works, name of the artist and the location with the palace, other parts are brief and vague. This makes it difficult to understand if Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo's panels were within the palace at that time and if they were, therefore, handed down to the daughter Eleonora and her husband Enrico Nencini.

Despite an annotation in the Sebright catalogue collection that recorded the two paintings coming from the same palace in Florence, their provenance and original setting have been widely debated.²²⁰ Speculations were advanced on the possible connection of the works with other 'primitive' paintings realised by Piero di Cosimo, all dated between 1485-1510: *The Hunting Scenes* (Figures 122-123), *The Forest Fire* (Figure 124), and *The Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs* (Figure 125).²²¹

²¹⁶ FLEMING 1973, 4-16; POLI 1986, 39-46; WARREN 2005, 729-741.

²¹⁷ DI MARCO 2003, 25-28.

²¹⁸ For Eleonora Nencini Pandolfini and Giovanni Freppa: DI MARCO 2003, 25-28.

²¹⁹ BNCF, Tordi 488, 'Inventario di Palazzo Incontri dall'eredità di Agnolo Pandolfini' (17 March 1785). Further documents of the Nencioni-Pandolfini family are in the Archivio Comunale of Florence.

²²⁰ The collection history of *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus* records that the panels entered the Sebright collection (Beechwood). A manuscript of the collection recorded the paintings coming from Palazzo Ridolfi in Florence. This was the building where the Vespucci lived in the Quattrocento and that was handed down to different families after 1532: FORLANI TEMPESTI and CAPRETTI 1996, 124-125.

²²¹ PANOFKY 1937, 12-30; ZERI 1959, 44. *The Hunting Scenes* have been connected to the painted cycle that decorated the house of Francesco del Pugliese as described by Vasari. *The Forest Fire* and

Given the scant surviving information on these panels and the difficulty in identifying them as autonomous works or as part of different cycles, no final solution has yet been proposed and doubts remain on their patronage, execution date, and the link that might have existed between these panels. Although sharing similar elements with the other paintings by Piero di Cosimo – such as the presence of satyrs, naked man, wild landscapes, I argue here that *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus* should be isolated from the other panels depicted by Piero di Cosimo. Placed in a barren landscape, both panels focus around the presence of honey, satyrs, and naked figures playing brass instruments. The paintings, both symmetrically divided by a similar hollow tree placed in the middle of the composition, have analogous measurements, which suggests that they were meant to be displayed as pendants. They are, moreover, stylistically different from the other paintings: in *The Hunt*, *The Return from the Hunt*, and in *The Forest Fire* the colours are darker, the scenes are populated with animals, and the forest settings do not match the airy landscape of *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus*.

The Hunt, *The Return from the Hunt*, and *The Forest Fire* with their ‘primitive’ looking figures, have become known as the ‘early history of man panels’ said to have been inspired by the writings of the Latin author Lucretius. As Erwin Panofsky first suggested, and Sharon Fermor and Dennis Geronimus later confirmed, *The Hunt* and *The Return from the Hunt* are based on Book V of Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura*, in which the author dealt with the emergence of different species at the beginning of the world and the evolution of man towards civilization.²²² In her study of the circulation of Lucretius’s writings in the Quattrocento, Alison Brown demonstrated that Florentine humanists were particularly oriented towards the *De Rerum Natura*, and the interest in this didactic poem fired the intellectual circle of Lorenzo di Piefrancesco de’ Medici: the poet

The Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs might have been self-standing pieces. We can exclude the fact that these panels were, together with *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus*, part of the Vespucci cycle as Carlo Gamba suggested. For the historiography of the primitive scenes of Piero di Cosimo see the most recent contribution: GERONIMUS 2006, 123-161; CALVESI 2013, 9-30.

²²² PANOFSKY 1972, 41; FERMOR 1993, 63-64; GERONIMUS 2006, 127-134.

and soldier Michele Marullo worked on the text of the *De Rerum Natura*, and the Lucretian texts became the theme of Adriani's university lectures and a source of influence for Bartolomeo Scala's poem *On Trees*.²²³

The Vespucci family also gravitated around Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco. Other than Guidoantonio, Amerigo the explorer maintained a close relationship with the young Lorenzo who appointed Amerigo as his business adviser in Lisbon. The relationship between the two men is further witnessed by the letter that Amerigo addressed to Lorenzo in 1500 following the discovery of unexplored lands in the New World. Amerigo's letter reported that the natives of the new lands who were living according to nature could be defined Epicureans rather than Stoics.²²⁴ This touches upon the Lucretian interest of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco and his circle, suggesting that Amerigo the explorer was acquainted with these trends.

While *The Hunt* and *The Return from the Hunt* were associated with Lucretius's account of evolution, and reveal Piero di Cosimo's fascination with primordial existence, a different textual source has been identified by Sharon Fermor for *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus*.²²⁵ The panels are based on Ovid's *Fasti*, a classical text in which the Roman author narrated the rituals celebrated in the six months of the Augustan calendar.²²⁶ The panels refer to a passage in Book III in which, describing the festivities related to March, Ovid recounted the event of the discovery of honey by Bacchus and his entourage for the Liberalia feast. Celebrated on March 17, the Liberalia included the preparation of cakes made with oil and honey.

²²³ BROWN 2010, 39, 105. For more general considerations of the importance of Lucretius and his writings in Renaissance Italy: PALMER 2012, 395-416.

²²⁴ LUZZANA CARACI 2007, 213-227.

²²⁵ FERMOR 1993, 82-83.

²²⁶ For an introduction to Ovid's *Fasti* and the contextualisation of the text with Roman culture and society: OVID 2000, xxv-LIV. For Renaissance artists who employed Ovid's *Fasti* as the textual source of their paintings: BAROLSKY 1998, 464-465.

Why would the Vespucci commission these images? It is difficult to connect the choice of Ovid, the *Fasti*, and the story of Silenus to the family, but a couple of hypotheses can be advanced. The choice of Book III might be in the fact that March corresponded to the month in which Guidoantonio purchased the property in via de' Servi. No connections can be established with the marriage of Giovanni Vespucci and Namiciana Nerli as the scant archival documentation does not provide information regarding the celebration of the wedding. In ancient Rome, the term '*fasti*' related to the *dies fasti*, the days on which it is permissible to undertake legal action in the court of the magistrate called the Praetor Urbanus. These days contrasted with the *die nefasti*, the days on which no legal action could be taken.²²⁷ The choice of Ovid's *Fasti* might therefore refer to Guidoantonio's activity as a lawyer and his engagement in Florence's social and political life.

A connection between Piero di Cosimo's panels and the Vespucci family can, however, be established by the fact that flying stripy insects are swirling at the top of the hollow tree in *The Discovery of Honey*. Although the presence of honey would prompt us to identify the insects as bees, this might not have been the case for fifteenth-century viewers. As discussed in Chapter 1, black and yellow flying insects were associated with the Vespucci family in Quattrocento Florence. Moreover, Gombrich recorded that while Ovid spoke of hornets (*cabrones*) in his *Fasti*, Renaissance commentaries of the text spoke of hornets and wasps (*cabrones* and *vespae*), as in the case of Paulus Marsus's commentary printed in Venice in 1485.²²⁸

The *Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus* follow the Ovidian poem closely. On the left part of *The Discovery of Honey*, a group of satyrs and bacchantes, armed with pans and crockery, approach the hollow tree in the centre where other satyrs are trying to attract bees into the trunk. On the right Silenus is represented on a donkey surrounded by satyrs and maenads. In the foreground a family of satyrs is witnessing the scene while opposite to them stand Bacchus and Ariadne. In the second panel, Silenus is represented in the centre of the painting

²²⁷ OVID 2000, xxxiii.

²²⁸ GOMBRICH 1972, 216 n. 139.

when falling off his donkey in the attempt to reach for more honey while the flying insects hit Silenus on his head and face. On the left side of the painting we see Silenus being taken care of by his friends who smear mud on his face to heal the painful stings.

The Vespucci panels were in all probability not displayed alone, but they matched two other paintings by Piero di Cosimo representing *Tritons and Nereids* (Figures 126-127). Today divided between Italy and the United States, *Tritons and Nereids* were probably conceived as a frieze decoration and the marine counterpart to the Silenus panels.²²⁹ Connection between the panel and the cycle was established due to a label placed on the back of the paintings which read: 'De Piero di Cosimo proveniente de la maison Salviati et citè dans la nouvelle édition de Vasari'.²³⁰ With their 'chains of interlocking figures', the two pictures probably occupied a secondary position in and functioned as complementary additions to the main narrative panels.²³¹ Mina Bacci – and later on Geronimus - noted that similarities appear in the twisted torsos of the marine creatures and the combatants of the *Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs*, but no provenance information exists to connect these panels.²³² Although the episode of the *Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs* would have suited a marriage decoration, I would exclude this work from those present in the Vespucci property in via de' Servi.²³³ The palette employed presents darker colours, and the theme of the episode, representing a violent battle, is fundamentally at odds with the happier atmosphere of the Vespucci panels.

²²⁹ GERONIMUS 2006, 106. One panel is today part of the Altomani & Co. gallery of Pesaro. The other panel belongs to the Sydney Freedberg Collection in Washington DC. I am grateful to Giancarlo Ciaroni and Simona Marelli of Altomani & Sons for having provided me with information on the panel and a high quality reproduction. The Pesaro panel will be included in the exhibition devoted to the career of Piero di Cosimo, scheduled to open at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, in February 2015, before moving to the Uffizi of Florence in June that year.

²³⁰ FORLANI TEMPESTI and CAPRETTI 1996, 124.

²³¹ FAHY 1965, 204.

²³² BACCI 1976, 91; GERONIMUS 2006, 107.

²³³ The battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs was a common theme adopted in decorative cycles and *cassoni* commissioned for weddings: GRAFTON 2010, 188.

What is the meaning of the cycle? Panofsky interpreted Bacchus's discoveries as a reflection of humankind's progress.²³⁴ This hypothesis was later refuted by Dennis Geronimus who argued that the discovery of honey was not related to the progress of humanity given that Lucretius's argument was centred around atoms and evolution principles.²³⁵ Thomas Mathews argued that the presence of Ariadne, Pan, and Bacchus, the latter the divinity of fertility, and the hollow tree as a womb metaphor in *The Discovery of Honey*, projected the panels into the realm of marriage.²³⁶ According to the author, other elements that foster a marriage-oriented reading are the presence of the honey, the prominent display of household utensils carried in the procession, and the onions, considered aphrodisiacs since antiquity.²³⁷ The presence of satyrs, symbol of physical love as seen in Chapter 4, further reinforces the idea of sexuality, and the presence of the family of satyrs on the front left side of *The Discovery of Honey* suggests the location of the panel in a domestic setting.²³⁸ Dennis Geronimus has also discussed how infrared reflectography on *The Misfortune of Silenus* showed the original presence of a satyr who approached a donkey from behind, overtly displaying his wild sexual desire (Figure 128).²³⁹ Establishing a link with reproduction, which was the primary goal of Renaissance marriages, families, baby satyrs, and overt sexual references suggest that the depictions were likely to have been commissioned on the occasion of the wedding of Giovanni di Guidoantonio Vespucci and Namiciana di Benedetto Nerli celebrated in 1500.²⁴⁰ As for the display of the panels, two options seem plausible. A bedchamber would have suited the marriage related theme of the depictions, but the celebratory features of the bacchanals, with the procession

²³⁴ PANOFSKY 1972, 63-64.

²³⁵ GERONIMUS 2006, 103-104.

²³⁶ MATHEWS 1963, 357-360.

²³⁷ Among the house-hold objects previously identified figured pans, pots, ladles, graters, fire-shovels, and waffle irons: GERONIMUS 2006, 102-104. The aphrodisiac meaning associated with onions remained also in the sixteenth century. Love-related features seem to be embodied also in the round, golden object hold by Venus in Bronzino's *Allegory* (c. 1545). Appearing like an apple, a closer look reveals it could be an onion. The artist's interest in linking onions to love is confirmed by the poem *La Cipolla del Bronzino Pittore* where the effects of onions are compared to those of love: COHEN 2008, 289-290; MALAGUZZI 2008, 204.

²³⁸ On satyrs as symbols of physical love and their 'monstrous' nature: FELTON 2012, 123-124.

²³⁹ GERONIMUS 2006, 101.

²⁴⁰ GERONIMUS 2006, 100.

of pans and the allusions to Roman feasts would have well suited a *sala*, where public receptions were likely to be hosted. The paucity of information regarding the original location of fifteenth-century panel paintings makes it difficult to know how common was to display painted *spalliere* in reception rooms. Some examples, however, has survived, such as those displayed by Isabella d'Este in the receiving rooms of the Ducal Palace.²⁴¹ It cannot, therefore, be excluded that Piero di Cosimo's paintings found their location in the *sala* of the Vespucci property.

Although a connection to marriage is indeed possible given the references to the ideas of family, fertility, and procreation, this interpretation seems limited when looking at the peculiar scenes executed by Piero di Cosimo. Figures, some of which are naked while others wear ripped clothes, are represented in a graceless way: the interlocking figures on the right side of *The Misfortune of Silenus*, who reach out for one another covering each other's eyes and ears, and Silenus's entourage in *The Discovery of Honey* give the impression of being childish or, as Geronimus said, 'clownish'.²⁴² Their half man half beast features, their brutal and primitive sexual explicitness, their overt gesticulation, and their strange facial expressions contribute to convey an unsettling feeling to the scene. The characters and the surrounding landscape enhance the savage and 'simple' essence of the scene. Also the onions, linked to the ideas of marriage and fertility as seen earlier, bring our attention to undomesticated life, onions often being associated with peasants in the fifteenth century.²⁴³ Although the strange figures and the grotesque-looking trees can be taken as the manifestation of Piero's own fantasy and eccentricity, as Paul Barolsky argued, I believe that other reasons also prompted the realisation of these singular depictions.²⁴⁴

The interest in fifteenth-century geographical discoveries in Africa, India, and the New World has increasingly attracted the attention of scholars who focused on the encounter with the 'other', the slave trade, the representations of natives

²⁴¹ BARRIAULT 1994, 13-14.

²⁴² GERONIMUS 2006, 106.

²⁴³ PLATINA 1998, 185-186; ALBALA 2002, 190.

²⁴⁴ BAROLSKY 1994, 87-97.

from Africa and India, and the perception of nakedness.²⁴⁵ Dennis Geronimus suggested that Piero di Cosimo's series of primitive panels (discussed above) was the visual counterpart of the descriptions of the newly discovered lands that, at the end of the fifteenth century, reached the Old World.²⁴⁶ Representing fights, wild men, satyrs, centaurs, and primitive scenes where characters are dominated by bestial instincts, these panels have been associated by Geronimus with the travel reports and letters written by Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci which presented the descriptions of exotic lands and their wild inhabitants.²⁴⁷ Visually, the panels present some analogies with the woodcut representing Columbus's first voyage to the New World (Figure 129). Printed in Florence in 1493, this illustration presents a group of naked men in an isolated and exotic landscape.²⁴⁸

These texts were likely to have influenced the imagination of Florentine patrons and artists that investigated, through the commission and execution of visual material, aspects such as civilization, the expansion of the space boundaries, and the encounter with the unfamiliar 'other'.²⁴⁹ These preoccupations were made stronger by the cultural trends of late fifteenth-century Florence that, as seen earlier, were centred around Lucretius and his writings on primordial existence and the evolution of mankind. As Alison Brown discussed, Lucretius's account of the evolution of mankind, in fact, happened to be aligned to the contemporary events of the time as the geographical discoveries of the New World opened up questions about mankind's primitive side and its progress towards civilization.²⁵⁰

The presence of satyrs, centaurs, tritons, and nereids in Piero di Cosimo's works encourages further consideration and investigation of this encounter with the 'other'. Discussing Antonio del Pollaiuolo's *Battle of Naked Men* in relation to

²⁴⁵ BURKE 2013, 714-739.

²⁴⁶ GERONIMUS 2006, 133-134.

²⁴⁷ GERONIMUS 2006, 133-134. See also: KAUFMANN 1984, 39, 45; GINZBURG 2005, 126; GERONIMUS 2006, 133; BROWN 2010, 89. On the visual representation of the newly discovered peoples: RUPPEL 1992, 14-56.

²⁴⁸ This illustration has been discussed in: BURKE 2013, 726.

²⁴⁹ RUPPEL 1992, 14-56.

²⁵⁰ BROWN 1979, 101; BROWN 2010, 89-90.

fifteenth-century voyages of Africa, India and the New World, Jill Burke recently argued that nudity in early Renaissance images could be interpreted by contemporary viewers as shameless and primitive, closely connected to mankind's primordial state.²⁵¹ Differently from Pollaiuolo's *Battle* and the illustrated edition of Columbus's letter of 1493 - where naked men were represented on their own - in Piero di Cosimo's *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus* male naked figures coexisted with monstrous mythological creatures such as centaurs and satyrs.²⁵² Although this does not challenge Burke's consideration of the perception of nakedness in the second half of the fifteenth century, it nonetheless questions the reasons for these representational choices. As I shall demonstrate, monsters can be taken as references to the native people of the lands discovered in the Quattrocento, and indicators of the anxiety that pervaded Europe in the late fifteenth-century.

Since antiquity, centaurs, satyrs, and marine monsters have been associated with the unknown and the unfamiliar. Greek myths told of various monstrous races such as the giants, Cyclopes, tritons, satyrs, and centaurs, the latter said to inhabit Thessaly, Elis, and Laconia.²⁵³ A reflection of these writings is visually mirrored in the cartographic production, where monsters are to be found in remote geographical areas.²⁵⁴ The studies carried out on medieval and renaissance cartography have in fact revealed that centaurs, satyrs and other monsters, featured in medieval and renaissance maps from the period bear similarities with painted examples. Although normally studied separately and considered as subjects belonging to two different spheres of knowledge, a comparison of Renaissance paintings and maps can prove helpful to shed light on the employment of

²⁵¹ BURKE 2013, 714-739.

²⁵² FIORENZA 2012, 153-177.

²⁵³ Among the other writers, Ktesias compared a tailed race in India with satyrs while Pliny located tribes of satyrs in Ethiopia and India: WITTKOWER 1942, 191-92; FELTON 2012, 122-123; STEEL 2012, 266; VAN DUZER 2012, 397, 430.

²⁵⁴ Studies on the ethnography of monstrous animals took into consideration the medieval production of maps where the majority of examples have survived. WITTKOWER 1942, 159-97; DASTON and PARK 1998, 21-66; KLINE REED 2001, 146-164. On monstrous animals in Medieval *bestiari*: MASPERO 1999, 5-30.

monstrous figures in fifteenth-century visual culture.²⁵⁵ Chet van Duzer, for example, recently analysed the geographical distribution of monsters in Medieval and Renaissance maps, showing that satyrs and centaurs featured in works such as the Hereford map.²⁵⁶ The representations of satyrs and centaurs persisted well into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and centaurs featured in the southern continent of Giovanni Francesco Camocio's map of 1567.²⁵⁷

While being represented in world maps, satyr and centaurs were also employed in manuscripts and paintings of the fifteenth century: a Vatican manuscript of 1460 presents a satyr and an ape on the same sheet;²⁵⁸ bellicose primitive figures featured in the already mentioned 'primitive' works of Piero di Cosimo;²⁵⁹ representations of centaurs appear in Giuliano da Sangallo's decorative frieze design for a fireplace executed for Giuliano Gondi (Figure 130);²⁶⁰ in the frieze decorating Bartolomeo Scala's urban villa in Florence (Figure 131);²⁶¹ in Filippino Lippi's *Wounded Centaur* (Figure 132); in Botticelli's *Minerva and the Centaur* (Figure 133); in the painted architecture in the *Calumny of Apelles* (Figure 134); and in his drawings of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (Figure 135).²⁶²

Botticelli's drawings for the *Divina Commedia* are of great interest in this context. Probably commissioned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici in the last

²⁵⁵ An attempt to compare cartographic and artistic productions was first done by Samuel Edgerton who focused on the scientific use of perspective employed in maps and paintings and architecture in fifteenth-century Florence: EDGERTON 1974, 275-292.

²⁵⁶ The fascinating aspect of the presence of monstrous figures in maps is a complex phenomenon. Although the present study is focussing on centaurs and satyrs, studies of Medieval and Renaissance cartography have demonstrated how maps also included representations of cyclopes, monocoli, many types of animals and marine monsters. For a recent discussion of this topic: VAN DUZER 2012, 387-435. For fifteenth-century theories regarding the existence of monsters in the New World: COSGROVE 2008, 105-109.

²⁵⁷ For sixteenth-century maps: VAN DUZER 2012, 417.

²⁵⁸ The manuscript belonged to Lodovico Gonzaga. WITTKOWER 1942, 191-199; GIULIANO 1972, 123-130.

²⁵⁹ GIULIANO 1972, 123-130.

²⁶⁰ GERONIMUS 2006, 108.

²⁶¹ For a discussion of the frieze decoration of Bartolomeo Scala palace and the way these images can be connected to fifteenth-century writings and culture: NETHERSOLE 2011, 466-485.

²⁶² MELTZOFF 1987, 141-143, 166-173; GERONIMUS 2006, 107-108; BROWN 2010, 36-38. For the revival and iconography of the centaurs in the late fifteenth century: GIULIANO 1972, 123-130; GRAFTON 2010, 187-189; GENTILE 2000, 64-65.

decade of the Quattrocento, the exact function of the drawings is still an object of debate.²⁶³ Sebastiano Gentile discussed the possibility of the drawings deriving their layout from cartographic material such as Ptolemy's *Geography*.²⁶⁴ This attests to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's interest in geography and maps which he shared with the Vespucci: the note of possession of a *Geografia*, once belonging to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco and today kept in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, indicates that the volume was lent to Giorgio Antonio Vespucci on 8 November 1482.²⁶⁵ When framing Botticelli's drawing for the *Divina Commedia* in light of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's cultural interests which encompass maps, geographical discoveries, and Lucretian primitivism, another observation can be made. Some of the album's sheets do not appear to be distant from the representations discussed above: the crowded groups comprising of little, naked figures in the sheet of the *Purgatorio* (Figure 136) share similarities with those illustrated on the Florentine woodcut of 1493 mentioned above (Figure 129).

Centaurs and satyrs represented in maps, manuscripts, paintings and architectural friezes seem to have shared the same meaning: these monstrous mythological creatures appear as classicising allusions to the wild man, of whom they embodied wild temper, instinct, and primitive life. The satyr, in particular, while retaining his bestial attitude, was also assigned further meanings by late fifteenth-century artists. Dürer and Piero di Cosimo were among the first artists to represent the 'human' side of satyrs as dwellers of remote lands who gathered in groups and families. This idea was in all probability suggested, as Lynn Frier Kaufmann correctly pointed out, 'by the confrontation with the real savages so recently discovered in the new world'.²⁶⁶ As Kaufmann noted, Dürer's *Rape of Europa* (Figure 137) acquired a specific meaning when it was realised that it recalled the recent voyage of Columbus. The representation of Europa reaching a new land

²⁶³ On Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco: BALDINI 2004b, 277-282. On Botticelli's drawings for the *Divina Commedia*: SCHULZE ALTCAPEBERG 2000, 14-35.

²⁶⁴ GENTILE 2000, 33-38.

²⁶⁵ GENTILE 1991, 42.

²⁶⁶ KAUFMANN 1984, 39.

where a group of satyrs are awaiting her would have paved the way to the identification of the satyrs with the inhabitants of unknown lands.²⁶⁷

Marine figures such as tritons and nereids also provide fertile ground for investigation, featuring in both Renaissance maps and paintings. Authors such as Pliny, Diodorus Siculus, and Propertius, recalled the risks of the ocean and associated the presence of sea monsters with it. The Genoese Map of 1457 (Figure 138) is indicative of the Renaissance beliefs associated with the dangers of the sea. In the map, in fact, four sea monsters are located in the Indian Ocean together with a siren.²⁶⁸ Piero di Cosimo's tritons and nereids, represented according to classical canons, are stylistically different from the demon-like creatures to be found in the Genoese Map. Closer to Piero di Cosimo's panel is the triton represented at the centre of Jacopo de' Barbari map of Venice realised in 1500 (Figure 139).²⁶⁹ The representation of marine creatures, persisting from the medieval tradition, enjoyed a revival in the last half of the fifteenth century associated with the transatlantic voyages and the writings of contemporary travelers. In 1493, for instance, Columbus recorded the sighting of three mermaids with human facial features near the coast of Haiti.²⁷⁰ From cartographic tradition to frieze decorations, the representation of marine creatures seems to have borne overt links with navigation, discoveries and explorations, alluding to the threats of the sea and the 'marvelous' creatures that inhabited it.²⁷¹

A similar feature of the earthly and marine creatures employed by Florentine artists and those represented in maps and manuscripts is the 'skin' of these monsters. Satyrs, centaurs, and tritons in paintings, maps and manuscripts are all represented with body hair and animal features. While tritons feature fish scales in lower parts of their body, satyrs and centaurs present hair, tails, goat legs, and

²⁶⁷ KAUFMANN 1984, 45. For parallels in Venetian art: LUCHS 2010, 1-60.

²⁶⁸ BNCF, Portolano 1; VAN DUZER 2012, 419.

²⁶⁹ FERRARI 2006, 23-41.

²⁷⁰ DREWAL 2012, 84.

²⁷¹ The most recent works on sea monsters in Medieval and Renaissance maps were carried out by Chet van Duzer who explored the conception of the ocean and its monstrous figures in cartography, art, and zoological studies: VAN DUZER 2011, 115-123 and 2013, 60-86.

pointed ears that overtly mark their otherness. Hairy bodies in particular were traditionally seen as something unusual and they were generally associated with alien people: Pliny the Elder already pointed out how monstrous races included hairy men and women;²⁷² and Sir John Mandeville recorded that the men of Dendros had skins as hairy as beasts.²⁷³ Hairy centaurs and satyrs were therefore associated with hairy men and women, all perceived as something unfamiliar, different and uncivilised that, questioning the nature of men, challenged the boundaries between humanity and bestiality.²⁷⁴ At the turn of the century hairy bodies became a specific feature for the representation of 'other' people: in the sixteenth-century, in fact, representations of male and female savages with bushy body hair stood in stark contrast with the representation of the inhabitants of the western part of the world. This was particularly evident in the case of women: the common practice of removing hair from the body shaped their western identity while marking racial differences.²⁷⁵

The idea of 'the monster' seems to have becoming a preoccupation in the late Quattrocento. Monsters not only featured in maps and paintings but the word "mostro" started to appear in written works such as chronicles and private diaries. Focussing the attention on the dissemination of prophecies and divination from the late fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth-century, Ottavia Niccoli highlighted the persistent circulation of the idea of the monstrous in Renaissance Italy. Images of monstrous creatures circulated through manuscripts and prints, while chronicles, diaries and pamphlets increased the use of words such as 'mostro', 'spaventevole' and 'prodigio': when Charles VIII invaded Italy in 1494 he was said to be ugly, closer

²⁷² BRAHAM 2012, 17.

²⁷³ This is witnessed in a fifteenth-century illustrated edition of the travels of Sir John Mandeville where a race of hairy people is represented: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Fr. 2810, fol. 219v. On this image and other Medieval texts that mention hairy people as alien beings: FRIEDMAN 1981, 28-29, 53-54.

²⁷⁴ FRIEDMAN 1981, 200-201.

²⁷⁵ On identity and self-fashioning achieved in relation to something perceived as strange and alien: GREENBLATT 1980, 8-9. Emblematic is the case of the Gonzales sisters who, affected by a genetic condition that made them hairy, move from the Canary Isles to the courts of Europe. Although they were integrated within the western society, they were still pointed out as 'different', raising medical interests due to their peculiar features that made them half human half beast: DAVIES 2012, 67-68.

to a monster than a man.²⁷⁶ In the same years, Italy registered an increasing number of 'monstrous' births.²⁷⁷ As people questioned the significance of these extraordinary events and looked for explanations to fit the monstrous births into the world, malformed children started to be interpreted as portents and connected to current religious and political events.²⁷⁸ The latter involved the prophetic words of Savonarola, who was preaching a Christian renewal and the spread of printed versions of the life of the Antichrist that found more refined representations in Luca Signorelli's frescos for the Cappella Brizio in the Duomo of Orvieto.²⁷⁹ Signorelli's scenes present devil-like figures in the main episodes while tritons and hippocamps are included in a fictive frieze.²⁸⁰

These examples of contemporary vulnerability help to understand why the proliferation of savages and monster-like images found fertile ground in Italy and, more generally, in Europe in the 1490s.²⁸¹ Politics, prophecies, transatlantic explorations and foreign encounters seem to have contributed to shape the Florentines' imaginary worlds. Fantastic monstrosities appeared in visual and written sources and their representation challenged the boundaries between cartographic and artistic production. When seen in this light the maps that circulated among Florentine intellectual circles assume a new value, appearing as key tools of knowledge that encompassed the scientific world as well as the complex visual culture of the Renaissance. Maps together with manuscripts and

²⁷⁶ NICCOLI 1990, 3.

²⁷⁷ Medical studies have tried to provide a scientific explanation of the monstrous births that occurred in the late fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth century: BATES 2005, 11-41.

²⁷⁸ BEC 1989, 253-270. NICCOLI 1990, 19. Monstrous births were not registered only in Italy but also in Germany as the study of Jennifer Spink discussed: SPINK 2009, Chapter 3. On portentous births: SMITH 2002, 267-283.

²⁷⁹ On Savonarola: WEINSTEIN 1970, 67-111.

²⁸⁰ The frescoes of Luca Signorelli were realised between 1499 and 1502. RIESS 1995, 51-74; GERONIMUS 2006, 108.

²⁸¹ For an overview of the monstrous figures developed in Renaissance Italian art: CHIABÒ and DAGLIO 1989, passim. For satyrs see in particular: PIERI 1989, 325-342. Strange and bizarre images also appeared in the north of Europe. A remarkable example of the late fifteenth century is Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (c.1480-1490. Oil on wood. 220 x 339 cm. Madrid, Prado). Bernard Aikema, focussing on the hybrid representations of Bosch, highlighted the independent development of monstrous motifs between Italy and the north of Europe: AIKEMA 2002, 111-135.

paintings perpetuated the belief in monsters as dwellers of the ocean and far-away lands, prompting the association of the inhabitants of the newly discovered lands with beastly creatures. Piero di Cosimo's panel should be interpreted in the same way: with the presence of satyrs, primitive landscapes, and marine monsters, the panels allude principally, I would argue, to the discovery of the New World and its inhabitants.²⁸²

The presence of cartographic elements within Piero di Cosimo's panels for the Vespucci house is not fortuitous, but finds its roots in the painter's artistic training. Piero di Cosimo was an apprentice in Cosimo Rosselli's workshop in which, as Edith Gabrielli highlighted, a wide range of artistic artefacts were produced, including manuscripts and maps with reproductions of Ptolemy's *Geographia*.²⁸³ Cosimo Rosselli collaborated with the cartographer Niccolò Germano and his brother Francesco Rosselli, artist and cartographer, worked as a miniaturist with Piero del Massaio who, as seen in Chapter 2, realised some maps for the Portuguese Alfonso Alvero.²⁸⁴ This web of connections places Piero di Cosimo within a specific entourage, reinforcing the possibility of the simultaneous use of similar artistic elements within paintings and maps.

Although Piero di Cosimo's panels for the Vespucci, with its satyrs and marine figures, may have been inspired by cartographic material, by the proliferation of similar iconographical elements in Florence, and by the Roman reliefs he had the chance to see in Rome, it cannot be altogether excluded that these monstrous motifs could have been suggested to the artist by Guidoantonio.²⁸⁵

²⁸² A reflection of these beliefs is given not only in the travellers' accounts but also in fifteenth-century writings that dealt with the description and life-style of the inhabitants of far-away lands: BURKE 2013, 724-726. Attempts to link the production of maps to the cultural milieu in which manuscripts and other forms of art were created exist only for the Medieval period. Similar attempts, in fact, do not seem to have been done for fifteenth-century maps, exclusively analysed for their scientific and geographical meaning.

²⁸³ For the complexity of Cosimo Rosselli's workshop: GABRIELLI 2005, 53-60. For the maps of Cosimo Rosselli's workshop: GABRIELLI 2007, 112-114, 120-123.

²⁸⁴ On Piero del Massaio: Chapter 2, p. 91. On Francesco Rosselli as artist and cartographer: TÖRÖK 2013, 166-174.

²⁸⁵ The motif of the tritons and nereids, as well as satyrs, was unusual in Florence during the fifteenth century. An increasing interest in these representations can be registered over the sixteenth century.

Guidoantonio's diplomatic missions between 1497 and 1499 brought him to Milan, Bologna, and Venice where he may have seen works of art representing satyrs and marine figures. As mentioned above, these occurred in the works of Dürer and Jacopo de Barbari as well as on the facades of buildings in Lombardy, Venice, and Bologna.²⁸⁶ In the latter some buildings presented elaborate friezes that featured tritons and nereids that seems to derive from the frieze of palazzo Mozzanica in Lodi, which bore connections with Mantegna's *Fighting of the Sea Gods* (Figure 140).²⁸⁷

To sum up, Piero di Cosimo's panels, inspired by the recent geographical discoveries, bore connections with Renaissance cartography and with the contemporary revival of Lucretius. Even if, unlike other paintings by Piero di Cosimo, a precise link between the Vespucci panels and Lucretius's text cannot be established, the Vespucci panels belonged to the same cultural milieu in which *The Hunt*, *The Return from the Hunt*, and *The Forest Fire* were realised. I propose to identify Guidoantonio Vespucci as the commissioner of these works given his close relationship with Lorenzo di Piefrancesco de' Medici who not only promoted Lucretius's texts, but demonstrated a marked interest in maps and geographical discoveries as his commission of drawings from Botticelli and the reception of Amerigo's letter suggest.

What was the ultimate meaning of the panels? To our eyes the paintings are subject to a fluid interpretation and different hypotheses can be advanced on their significance. Displayed in the Vespucci property, the paintings were likely to have prompted reflections – and perhaps discussions - on the progress of mankind from

A notable example is the fountain of Bartolomeo Ammanati's *Fountain of Neptune* in Piazza della Signoria. For Piero di Cosimo journey to Rome in 1481 and the influence that ancient roman relieves had on artists of the late Quattrocento: DACOS 1969, 55-62; GERONIMUS 2006, 14-15.

²⁸⁶ For the city of Bergamo, its painted facades, and the recent restoration works undertaken to preserve fifteenth and sixteenth-century depictions: ROSSI 2009, 118-119. On the importance and strong presence of sea monsters in Renaissance Venetian art: LUCHS 2010, 59. For Bologna: DROGIN 2010, 244-324.

²⁸⁷ Palazzo Mozzanica was built in the fifteenth century by Giovanni Mozzanica, chancellor of the Sforza court in 1488.

his bestial instincts to its educated and civilised side: in the scenes, naked figures coexist with semi-dressed ones and despite the ungracious attitudes of the characters, the sexual explicitness, and the gesticulation as the main tool of communication (which seems to conceal the lack of language), the presence of bowls, domestic utensils, and clothes are a sign of the evolution of culture. A second hypothesis is that the presence of satyrs might have fostered a connection to Saint Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* in which both humans and monstrous figures are considered God's creatures, and a reflection on the interaction of 'us' with the newly discovered 'other'.²⁸⁸ A final possibility is that the 'light-hearted' scenes, with clumsy figures, might have been looked at for their inner simplicity: the freedom that characterises Piero di Cosimo's scenes, where its figures lived according to nature rather than human laws, stood in stark contrast with the politicised, corrupt, and divided Florentine society whose complexity found a visual expression in Botticelli's cycle, also displayed in via de' Servi and discussed in the following section.

4. Love, chastity and governance in Botticelli's cycle

'Round an apartment of the house of Giovanni Vespucci, now belonging to Piero Salviati, in the via de' Servi he made many pictures which were enclosed by frames of walnut-wood, by way of ornament and paneling, with many most lively and beautiful figures'.²⁸⁹

Vasari, just like he did for Piero di Cosimo, provides a brief description of the pictures painted by Botticelli in the Vespucci's property in via de' Servi. Following the information provided by the text, two panels attributed to Botticelli have been identified as the pieces likely to have been displayed: *The Story of Virginia* (Figure

²⁸⁸ This was also hypothesised for *The Hunting Scenes*: GERONIMUS 2006, 130.

²⁸⁹ For the English translation: BARRIAULT 1994, 12. The original text reads as follows: 'Nella via de' Servi in casa di Giovanni Vespucci, oggi di Piero Salviati, fece intorno <a> una camera molti quadri, chiusi da ornamenti di noce, per ricignimento e spalliera, con molte figure e vivissime e belle', VASARI 1967, vol. 3, 196.

141) and *The Story of Lucretia* (Figure 142).²⁹⁰ Linked to the Vespucci and considered a marriage piece, the scant information relating to the provenance of the paintings does not reveal further insights into their commission and the identity of the commissioner. Both panels are recorded for the first time in the nineteenth century. The *Story of Lucretia*, exhibited in London in 1893 at the New Gallery, entered the Isabella Gardner collection the following year; *The Story of Virginia* discovered by the Italian connoisseur Giovanni Morelli around 1870 in the gallery of the Monte di Pietà in Rome, was bequeathed by Morelli to the Accademia Carrara of Bergamo in the 1890s. Unlike the panels of Piero di Cosimo, the surviving information about the provenance of Botticelli's panels does not establish any link to the Vespucci family. Nevertheless, the investigation I carried out demonstrates that consideration about the commission of the paintings can still be advanced in light of the Vespucci family's history. The occasion of the commission is most probably to be identified as the wedding between Giovanni Vespucci and Namiciana di Benedetto Nerli, like the Piero di Cosimo panels.²⁹¹

A problem that has arisen in relation to *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia* regards the identification of the pieces that comprise Botticelli's cycle. According to Vasari Botticelli had, in fact, realised *molti quadri*, which led art historians to look for other possible paintings to add to the decoration.²⁹² Lorenza Melli recently suggested that the drawing *The Martyrdom of S. Lucy* at the Louvre could have been part of the composition (Figure 143).²⁹³ The author pointed out the affinities in form and content between the drawing and *The Story of Lucretia*, noting the similarities between the soldiers who gather around Lucretia and Lucy's jailers. Although the subject of the drawing, centred on the story of a female saint with overt references to the idea of chastity, would fit the Vespucci cycle dedicated to

²⁹⁰ HENDY 1974, 38-41; LIGHTBOWN 1978, 101-106; ETTLINGER 1996, 116; BASKINS 1998, 128-159, 160-185; ZAMBRANO and NELSON 2004, 602; CECCHI 2005, 341.

²⁹¹ This hypothesis was already advanced and sustained by: LIGHTBOWN 1978, 101-106; TINAGLI 1997, 41-42; BASKINS 1998, 128-185; GERONIMUS 2006, 101.

²⁹² VASARI 1967, vol. 3, 196; RIGON 2000, 150-157.

²⁹³ The drawing has only been recently considered the production of Botticelli's workshop while the original attribution linked it to Raffaellino del Garbo: MELLI 2009, 350.

famous women of antiquity, I believe that several aspects remain to be investigated before connecting the drawing to the painted *istorie*. While *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia* unfold in several episodes, the *Martyrdom of St. Lucy* focuses on one moment, lacking the narrative sequences that characterise the painted panels. It could, however, be argued that the drawing only presents a small part of a larger composition, originally meant to unfold in several episodes just like the stories of Virginia and Lucretia. Finally, while the episodes of Virginia and Lucretia are taken from Roman antiquity, the story of St. Lucy derives from religious sources. This opens up thematic issues and questions the possibility that St. Lucy had a counterpart, and whether stories of pagan heroines and martyr saints could have co-existed in the same cycle. Lacking further evidence, any consideration regarding the drawing remains highly speculative and its link with Botticelli's cycle is yet to be proved.

Botticelli based *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia* on Titus Livy's *History of Rome*. The Roman author was the first to compare the stories of the two heroines, giving one of the most detailed accounts of the episodes. Botticelli's *The Story of Virginia*, recounting how a Roman father preferred to kill his daughter rather than let her be dishonoured, unfolds in several sequences in Botticelli's painting: starting from the left, Virginia is assaulted by Marcus Claudius Tacitus who wants to force her to yield to Appius Claudius Caecus; he carries her to the tribunal presided over by Appius Claudius who declares her a slave; Virginia's husband and father plead for clemency; the father kills her to preserve the family honour; in the centre foreground the Roman army is incited to revolt. Both sides of the Roman tribunal in which the scenes are set present a door framed by a white stone pediment. The one on the left represents a scene of punishment outside the walls of a town. Above the right doorway is the representation of a battle, with a sarcophagus full of arms in the front.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ For a description and stylistic analysis of the panel: LIGHTBOWN 1978, 103-106; BASKINS 1998, 160-185.

The *Story of Lucretia*, a noblewoman who was raped by the son of the last king of Rome, Sextus Tarquinius, is similarly centred around the idea of *pudicitia* and represented in several episodes that culminate with Lucretia's corpse displayed in the centre of the picture so as to highlight her heroic personality.²⁹⁵ Set in a square, with a column supporting a white marble statue of David in the centre, the scene is surrounded by buildings at either side. The great triumphal arch behind the column presents a series of reliefs, some of which are taken from Livy's *History of Rome*, and that Cristelle Baskins described as 'metacommentary' on the story of Lucretia.²⁹⁶ The reliefs on the lower register of the arch feature two moments of the story of the young Roman Mucius Scaevola who, having failed in his intent to kill the Etruscan king Porsenna, punished himself by thrusting his right hand into a fire. On the upper left relief the Roman Marcus Curtius is represented on his horse, sacrificing himself to the god of Hades by entering a pit in the Roman Forum. On the upper right relief Achilles is dragging the body of Hector.²⁹⁷ The relief above the main arch presents the spoils of a Roman triumph.

Of identical dimensions, Botticelli's *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia* were in all probability meant to be displayed in pendant: both panels make use of continuous narrative which is to be read from left to right; they present a similar architecture that defines and symmetrically divides the stage on which the crowded scenes take place; and share the presence of fictive reliefs that centre around the idea of revolt, sacrifice, and courage, and are thematically linked to the main story presented in the foreground. In his description of the Vespucci bedchamber Vasari recorded that the panels were used as *spalliere*. Botticelli had previously worked on this typology of painting, one of the best surviving examples being the four panels representing *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti*. Commissioned by Lorenzo il Magnifico around 1482-1483 for the wedding of

²⁹⁵ For the stylistic analysis of the panels and the comparison with other depictions of the same subject: BASKINS 1998, 128-159.

²⁹⁶ BASKINS 1998, 142.

²⁹⁷ LIGHTBOWN 1979, 101-102; BASKINS 1998, 143.

Giannozzo Pucci and Lucrezia Bini, the panels are likely to have once fitted around four walls of a room.²⁹⁸

Jonathan Nelson advanced a hypothesis on the disposition of the Vespucci panels. By focussing attention on the structure of the composition, the perspective of the space and the position of the figures – such as Lucretia’s dead body – Nelson argued that Botticelli created scenes that were meant to be displayed above the head of the viewer, whose gaze would have been directed upwards.²⁹⁹ The panels, therefore, could have been employed as *sovraporte*, hung above two different doors of the same room, or perhaps inserted in wooden walls.³⁰⁰ Building on Nelson’s study, a likely visual comparison may be established between Botticelli’s panels and Ghirlandaio’s *Birth of the Virgin*, frescoed in the Tornabuoni chapel in Santa Maria Novella (Figure 144). The scene is set within a room, skillfully constructed along perspective lines. The right part of the composition features wooden wainscoting comprising of a lower register of wood panels, two relief friezes with dancing putti, and a cornice at the top. As the shape of Botticelli’s panels, longer than they are high, seem to recall those of Ghirlandaio’s frieze, it cannot be excluded that the *Stories* could have been displayed in a similar way: placed above the viewer’s head and meant to be viewed from the bottom upwards, they might have been placed one next to the other on the same wall, or facing each other on the opposite side of the room, according to the architecture of the bedchamber.

With his panels Botticelli fits into a visual tradition that, since the beginning of the fifteenth century, saw the stories of Virginia and Lucretia displayed together as domestic paintings, variously adorning *cassoni* and *spalliere*.³⁰¹ Anne Barriault,

²⁹⁸ OLSEN 1992, 146-170; BARRIAULT 1994, 12-13; CECCHI 2005, 202-218.

²⁹⁹ NELSON 2010, 146.

³⁰⁰ Displaying panels above doors was not unusual in Florentine houses. The inventory of Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici dated 1498 recorded Botticelli’s *Minerva and the Centaur* displayed above a door, NELSON 2010, 350; CECCHI 2011, 216.

³⁰¹ BASKINS 1998, 161. Beyond Botticelli, other artists were Flippino Lippi, whose *Virginia* is the pendant to the *Lucretia* in Palazzo Pitti and Jacopo del Sellaio whose *Virginia* and *Lucretia* are in Edinburgh and Dublin.

Paola Tinagli, and Cristelle Baskins discussed how these panels belong to the category of exemplary narrative paintings, commissioned to instruct newly married couples on ideal behaviour and used to decorate their bedchambers.³⁰² Exhortatory episodes became the focus of a new literary genre evolving around illustrious women and that involved authors such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, Antonio Cornazzaro, Vespasiano da Bisticci, Sabadino degli Arienti and Jacopo Filippo Foresti.³⁰³ Examples were variously taken from ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and the Old Testament: Dido became an example of faithfulness; Cloelia and Camilla of civic courage; the Vestal Virgin Tuccia of chastity; Esther and Judith of civic behaviour; and Susannah of the ideal behaviour of married women.³⁰⁴

Although the majority of painted narratives featured on bedroom furniture in the fifteenth century can normally be linked to ideas of marriage and virtue generally addressed at women, this connection is somewhat limiting when considering the stories of Lucretia and Virginia. The episodes of Lucretia and Virginia recounted by the Roman author Livy are centred around the idea of the revolt against tyranny and dictatorship, referring in particular to the revolution that created the Roman republic. Livy declared that as the rape and death of Lucretia had brought the expulsion of kings from Rome, so the rape and death of Virginia ended the violent rule of the Decemvires.³⁰⁵ This prompted scholars to connect the panels to the unsettling situation Florence was experiencing in the 1490s. Drawing on Roman culture and tradition Botticelli's scenes, depicting episodes that referred to the end of violent Roman governments and supporting rebellion against dictatorship, were said to overtly allude to the expulsion of Piero de' Medici from Florence. General consensus, therefore, has interpreted the stories of Virginia and Lucretia as anti-Medicean and anti-tyrannic depictions.³⁰⁶

³⁰² WITHOFT 1982, 43-59; BARRIAULT 1994, 95-132.

³⁰³ AJMAR-WOLLHEIM 2000, 244.

³⁰⁴ BARRIAULT 1994, 95-132; TINAGLI 1997, 31-32; BASKINS 1998, 1-25. For Boccaccio and his story of Lucretia: FRANKLIN 2006, 138-148.

³⁰⁵ BASKINS 1998, 163, 171.

³⁰⁶ LIGHTBOWN 1978, 101-106; LIGHTBOWN 1989, 261-269; BASKINS 1998, 129-130. RIGON 2000, 154; FRANKLIN 2006, 138-139; PAOLINI et al. 2010, 194-195. RODESCHINI 2012, 31-35.

Jerzy Miziolek was the first to associate early Renaissance representations of *The Story of Lucretia* on Florentine *cassoni* to republican feelings.³⁰⁷ According to the author, early representations of Lucretia in Florentine artistic productions were linked to the *Declamatio Lucretiae*, a treatise written by the Florentine Chancellor Coluccio Salutati. Here Lucretia's suicide was honoured as an emblem of republican liberty, at a time when the Commune was threatened by Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan.³⁰⁸ Cristelle Baskins further developed this argument by comparing the different representations of Lucretia that decorated fifteenth-century *cassoni* and *spalliere*.³⁰⁹ The author noted that the domestic pictures differed from one another in their treatment of the suicide, the location, the audience, and the effects. While some depictions (such as those of the Master of Charles of Durazzo, the Master of Marrandi, and Biagio di Antonio) stressed the private character of the suicide representing Lucretia in a bedroom surrounded by her family, others (such as the *spalliera* paintings of Botticelli, Filippino Lippi, and Jacopo del Sellaio) transformed her suicide into a public event: in these *spalliere*, the dead body of Lucretia is positioned at the centre of the composition, surrounded by impassioned Roman soldiers who, incited by Brutus, are ready to avenge Lucretia's death and overthrow the Tarquins.

Baskins's argument has formed the basis for the interpretation of Botticelli's panels in via de' Servi: perceived as politicised images, they have been seen as allusions to the events of the 1490s, in particular the expulsion of the Medici in 1494. This argument has been supported by the fact that Botticelli's *Story of Lucretia* features in the centre of the panel a porphyry column surmounted by the statue of the David, symbol of the Medici republic.³¹⁰ Ronald Lightbown, Jonathan Nelson, Emanuela Draffa, and Margaret Franklin interpreted the statue of David as an allusion to Donatello's work that was moved from Palazzo Medici in via Larga to Piazza della Signoria in 1495, becoming the symbol of the new Republic and of the

³⁰⁷ MIZIOLEK 1994, 1-4, 31-52.

³⁰⁸ For the full text of the *Declamatio Lucretiae* and the English translation: JED 1989, 142-152.

³⁰⁹ BASKINS 1998, 128-159.

³¹⁰ For the symbolism of the statue of the David in Quattrocento Florence: McHAM 2001, 32-47.

Medici defeat.³¹¹ *The Story of Lucretia* and *The Story of Virginia* have therefore been interpreted as anti-Medicean depictions: the scenes as overt allusions to the expulsion of Piero de' Medici from Florence, and a 'manifesto' of republicanism.

This has generated confusion among scholars who, when looking for a possible patron of these works, recognised the difficulty of connecting them to a Medici partisan family like the Vespucci. Ronald Lightbown suggested that it was improbable that depictions alluding to the expulsion of the Medici could have been painted for Guidoantonio Vespucci, an 'old Medicean supporter'.³¹² Similar conclusions were reached by Emanuela Daffra, who argued that overt anti Medici panels could have not been commissioned by the Vespucci family.³¹³ Jonathan Nelson, although admitting that the Vespucci did not maintain a consistent position in their alliance to the Medici, did not investigate this aspect further, concluding that Botticelli's panels alluded to the expulsion of Piero de' Medici from Florence.³¹⁴ Similar doubts were raised by Cristina Rodeschini during the exhibition organised in Bergamo in 2012 that featured the paintings by Botticelli preserved in the collection of the Accademia Carrara, including *The Story of Virginia*.³¹⁵ According to these authors it is difficult to connect Botticelli's panels to the Vespucci and, even more, to pin down which family member would have commissioned these depictions believed to be anty-tyrannical and anti-Medicean. Although Guidoantonio, appearing the most suitable candidate, was singled out, his inconsistent political position in the 1490s raised scholars's doubts about his identification with Botticelli's patron.³¹⁶

The reasons adduced for the skepticism concerning the Vespucci as patrons of Botticelli's panels reveal a lack of knowledge of the Vespucci family, and a misconception of the political position assumed by Guidoantonio in the last decade

³¹¹ LIGHTBOWN 1989, 261-269; RIGON 2000, 154; FRANKLIN 2006, 138-139; PAOLINI et al. 2010, 194-195.

³¹² LIGHTBOWN 1989, 269.

³¹³ RIGON 2000, 150-157.

³¹⁴ Nelson 2010, 194-197.

³¹⁵ RODESCHINI 2012, 30-35.

³¹⁶ For a list of the studies that considered Guidoantonio's political position ambiguous and fluid: RODESCHINI 2012, 34.

of the fifteenth century. The political activity of Guidoantonio Vespucci examined earlier, allows us to reconsider the hypotheses previously advanced by scholars. The *Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia* should not be seen as anti-Medicean and anti-tyrannical depictions, nor as a visual allusion to the expulsion of Piero de' Medici, or a manifesto of the newly founded Republic and its Great Council. Instead, I propose to identify Botticelli's panels as overt manifestations of oligarchic republicanism. The episodes of Lucretia and Virginia should be linked to the unsettling events that were oppressing Florence in those years, from the civic fights to the invasion of the French army. The Roman heroines might also be taken as personifications of Florence. Lauro Martines noted that in political poetry the most common metaphor for a city was the image of a woman variously described as chaste, honoured, raped or abused.³¹⁷ Just like rich Venice was identified as a woman dressed in resplendent clothes, and Genoa as the queen of the sea, Florence, violated and 'entered' by the enemy, was personified by the two raped Roman heroines.

The silence and 'passivity' of the dead heroines is contrasted to the activity of Brutus and Virginius who exert their male authority. In the episode of Lucretia, Brutus reveals his oratorical skills and encourages the Romans to expel the Tarquins. In the episode of Virginia, Virginius kills his daughter to preserve her integrity. Comparison might be established between the authority performed by Brutus and Virginius and Guidoantonio Vespucci and his political allies. Brutus's oratory skills might symbolically refer to those of Guidoantonio, orator and lawyer of Florence; the courage of Virginius and the sacrifice of his daughter might find a parallel in the carefully thought and strategically planned political decisions of Florence's oligarchs. Just like Virginius, they acted for Florence's good, making the city 'die' by letting the French and the Great Council take power. Nonetheless the oligarchs were still at the forefront of political life and worked in order to turn the situation to their advantage. This would have happened in 1512, with the abolition of the Republic and the return of the Medici. In this light, the figure that stands in

³¹⁷ MARTINES 2001, 242.

the centre of *The Story of Virginia* (Figure 145) is significant. Represented behind the Roman army, he is dressed in red like a politically active man of Florence. His stillness contrasts with the movement of the soldiers and his gaze, moving away from the scene which meets that of the onlooker, seems to contemplate and foresee future events with confidence and pride.

Botticelli's stories are indeed representations of republican feeling, but the kind of 'republicanism' that Guidoantonio and his faction believed in. The themes of rebellion that characterise the episode of Lucretia should therefore be considered in light of Guidoantonio's aims: eradicating from Florence those who were abusing and violating the city, such as the French, the Signoria, the Great Council and the minor guildsmen who had no right to access the public offices. In the *Story of Lucretia* the figure of Brutus is emblematic. Placed in the centre of the composition above the dead body of Lucretia, he raises his sword in the air, creating a symbolic link between the sword and the column behind him that, triumphally rising above the square, displays the David, a historical symbol of the Florentine republic (Figure 146).³¹⁸

5. Filippino Lippi and the '*tomdo chominciato di Giovanni Vespucci*'

Botticelli's legacy in the Vespucci property was not limited to the realization of *The Story of Lucretia* and *The Story of Virginia*, but also included collaboration with his helper, Filippino Lippi, who entered the master's *bottega* in the 1470s.³¹⁹ When Filippino Lippi died in 1504, an inventory of his house was drawn up. It recorded all the paintings present in the artist's studio, the subject matter and the name of the patrons who commissioned the works. Item number 79 of the inventory records the presence of a '*tomdo chominciato di Giovanni Vespucci*' together with a *tondo* of the Virgin for Filippo del Pugliese and another one for Donato Tornabuoni.³²⁰ None

³¹⁸ For a discussion of Renaissance pedestals and the celebratory value of columns: WRIGHT 2011, 23-31.

³¹⁹ CECCHI 2011, 83-117; NELSON 2004, 85-99.

³²⁰ CARL 1987, 373-391.

of these works have so far been identified, and it is not known what the *tondo* for Giovanni Vespucci represented. The definition *chominciato* alludes to the fact that the *tondo* was unfinished at the time Filippino died and that it was never displayed in Giovanni Vespucci's house. General assumptions can still be made around this commission. It can be hypothesised that the painting was of a religious subject, according to the tradition of the Florentine *tondo*.³²¹ As generally happened with religious works, the painting was, in all probability, meant to be displayed in a bedroom or antechamber, and used for domestic devotional or didactic purposes.³²² It can also be hypothesised that the commissioner of this work was Giovanni di Guidoantonio. Not only does his name appear in relation to the *tondo* on Filippino's inventory, but his role as commissioner of the work also fits chronologically. As the *tondo* was only started in 1504 it can be assumed that it was commissioned not too long before the death of Filippino, around 1503-1504. By this time Guidoantonio was already deceased (1501), leaving Giovanni as owner of the property and the only family member who could have possibly been in charge of the commission.

The connection between Filippino Lippi and Giovanni Vespucci could have been prompted by several factors. Botticelli may have played an intermediary role: through the artist, or his workshop, the Vespucci could have been introduced to the younger Filippino. A close collaboration between Botticelli and Filippino is documented towards the end of the fifteenth century, when the master's workshop produced small domestic panels in which the hand of Filippino is distinguishable. It would therefore seem likely that Filippino was commissioned to produce paintings for the decoration of the newly acquired Vespucci property as Botticelli had previously completed work there. The vicinity of Filippino and the Vespucci could

³²¹ OLSON 1993, 31-65; OLSON 2000, 83-105.

³²² LYDECKER 1987, 175-183. Beyond devotional use, religious images were regarded as important instruments for the edification of the soul. Representations of the Virgin and Child, for instance, were commissioned and displayed for different reasons, including for the 'imprinting' powers they were believed to have on pregnant mothers: TINAGLI 1997, 162; HOLMES 1999, 141; MATTHEWS GRIECO 2000, 286; JOHNSON 2002, 135-161. Musacchio discussed the commission of devotional art for marriages: MUSACCHIO 2000, 147-164.

have also prompted their friendship. It should in fact be remembered that Filippino Lippi lived along via degli Alfani, just a few meters away from the Vespucci property in via de' Servi. His involvement in a Vespucci commission could therefore be interpreted in light of the theories relating to the concepts of friendship, neighborhood, and patronage analysed in Chapter 2. Finally, connections could have been made through the Nerli, relatives of the Vespucci through the wedding of Giovanni and Namiciana, and for whom Filippino realised the family altarpiece for the Church of Santo Spirito.³²³

It was the Vespucci-Nerli-Filippino link that encouraged Jonathan Nelson and Patrizia Zambrano to suggest that *Erato* (Figure 147) might have been a Vespucci commission. Dated 1500, the painting represents the muse Erato leading a swan by a golden leash. The presence of the swan and the lyre placed on the left side of the composition has induced scholars to interpret the painting as the allegory of music.³²⁴ While the swan can be seen as an attribute of Apollo, the lyre presents the head of a stag, generally used to represent the auditory sense. The presence of myrtle has also prompted speculations over the possible nature of the painting as a marriage piece.³²⁵ According to Nelson, who dated the panel around 1504, it is possible that this painting was commissioned for the wedding of Giovanni Vespucci and Namiciana Nerli. As seen in the first part of this chapter, the notary employed by this branch of the family in the end of the fifteenth century was Ser Manetti. No information about Giovanni and Namiciana's wedding was retrieved from the legal records he produced between 1499 and 1504 and no information that could link *Erato* – or Filippino Lippi – to the Vespucci. The inventory made at the death of Filippino Lippi is enough to attest that Giovanni Vespucci commissioned a *tondo* from the artist, but the lack of further archival documentation makes it currently impossible to ascertain whether the Vespucci commissioned *Erato*. Moreover if the

³²³ The altarpiece was executed in the late 1490s: BRIDGEMAN 1988, 668-671.

³²⁴ WINTERNITZ 1956, 379-395.

³²⁵ ZAMBRANO and NELSON 2004, 602.

painting was commissioned for the Vespucci-Nerli wedding the panel was most likely to have been executed c.1500.

Although our knowledge of the Vespucci property in via de' Servi remains partial, especially in regards to its architecture, the research undertaken has enriched our understanding of the building, revealing new elements of its history, structure, and interior decoration. In particular, this chapter has shown that the Medici were among the possessors of the building in the Quattrocento; provided evidence on some architectural features of the property, as emerged from archival material; and interpreted the painted cycles according to the life and activity of Guidoantonio Vespucci.

Taking its starting point from the common definition of *palazzo*, the Vespucci property should be considered a 'large' house that, comprising several *edifici*, included bedrooms, an antechamber, a kitchen, a balcony, and a wine cellar. Although the building seems not to have had the powerful visual appearance typical of the imposing 'fortified' Florentine palaces such as those of the Medici, Strozzi, Rucellai, and Tornabuoni families, it still retained a prominent position in the city in the last years of the fifteenth century. Guidantonio Vespucci acquired the property in 1498 and around the same time he commissioned two painted cycles that adorned its interior. Respectively realised by Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo, the decorations included *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia*; *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus*; and two panels representing *Tritons and Nereids*. Commissioned between 1498 and 1501, the panels were intended to adorn the rooms of Giovanni di Guidantonio and Namiciana di Benedetto Nerli, a newly married couple who had taken up residence in the house in via de' Servi. Not only do *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortune of Silenus* match the descriptions given by Vasari, but their presence in the hands of Freppa reinforce the likelihood that they were part of the decoration commissioned by the Vespucci, which remained in place until the Incontri purchased the property.

As the Vespucci retained the house in via de' Servi from 1498 to 1532, this makes the family the only possible commissioners of the panels. The Salviati family, in fact, purchased the property in the sixteenth-century when both Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo were already deceased.³²⁶ The Tornabuoni are also unlikely. It is impossible to know whether Giovanni or Lorenzo Tornabuoni ever lived in via de' Servi after having inherited the property from Giovanni de' Medici in 1496. Moreover, the years in which they can be presumed to be in possession of the house, from 1496 to 1498, corresponded to the most financially difficult period for the Tornabuoni family. A Medici commission should also be excluded. According to the document retrieved from the Gherardi Piccolomini archive, the property in via de' Servi was bequeathed by Giovanni de' Medici to Giovanni and Lorenzo Tornabuoni. It is possible that the property passed to Giovanni de' Medici in 1492, following the death of his father Lorenzo il Magnifico; it is unlikely that Giovanni de' Medici commissioned these images that research has proven close to the ideals of those gathering around Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici.

The analysis carried out on Guidoantonio's life and activity and the painted cycles realised by Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo allowed me to establish links between the paintings and the lives and interests of the Vespucci family. Taken from ancient Roman texts, both cycles present elements that show a connection with Guidoantonio's political and cultural interests. *The Story of Virginia* and *The Story of Lucretia*, likely to have been displayed in a bedchamber, are the visual manifestations of Guidoantonio's political views: by focussing on two episodes centred on the rape of two Roman heroines, the panels allude to the formation of a Florentine oligarchy, the one that Guidoantonio, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, and other prominent citizens sought. Centred on the ideas of male authority, oratorical skills, and Roman law, the panels seem also to allude to Guidoantonio's activity as a lawyer, ambassador, and politician, thus suggesting to identify Guidoantonio as the likely commissioner of these works.

³²⁶ Botticelli died in 1510 while Piero di Cosimo in 1522: CECCHI 2005, 360; GERONIMUS 2006, 18-19.

Similarly, Piero di Cosimo's representation of satyrs, centaurs, nereids, tritons and monstrous figures establishes connections with the unbalancing events of the last decade of the century. Since antiquity, monstrous creatures were employed in maps as well as visual and textual material and served to indicate the presence of unknown races in remote parts of the world. As these peoples needed to be marked as 'other', they were given 'different' attributes normally consisting in body deformities that stressed their otherness, prompting westerner's fear of and fascination for these 'marvels'. As the representation of satyrs, centaurs, and tritons would, I propose, have prompted association with cartography and the world of discoveries, Piero di Cosimo's figures bear overt references to the natives of the New World, depicted according to the perception of them by the West, namely standing in between classical antiquity and the 'primitive' setting of Lucretius's writings. Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, which the panels seemingly allude to, projects Guidoantonio's commission within the cultural interest expressed by Lorenzo di Piefrancesco de' Medici's circle in the 1490s.

Both Piero di Cosimo and Botticelli's cycle, so different in their meaning and representations, simultaneously allude to marriage and contemporary events. By placing the body at the centre of attention, whether the physically altered bodies of the satyrs, or the violated bodies of Lucretia and Virginia, both cycles explored the nature of mankind, the boundaries between instinct and reason, justice and injustice, morality and immorality, nature and law, bestiality and civilisation. Apparently disjointed, the two commissions are, in fact, connected with one another as they both stimulate reflections on opposite yet interlocking themes. Certainly not explicit in the paintings, this particular reading would have been available to a selected and knowledgeable audience. The Vespucci and their kin, men of culture as they were, would have been struck by the scenes depicted in the cycles, which would have been contextualized in light of the social, political, cultural, and geographical changes of the time.

Investigation into the Vespucci civic position in the 1490s has shown that the family's relationship with the Medici changed. The Vespucci, through the activity of Guidoantonio, were among those who supported the exile of the main branch of the Medici from Florence, reinforcing the ties with those families of the old ruling class who sought a Medici-free city. Gombrich's insightful observation mentioned earlier - regarding the possibility of seeing the formation of groups and antagonism against the Medici while Lorenzo il Magnifico was still living - does indeed appear as a likely possibility. In the 1490s the Vespucci strengthened their relationship with Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici to whom they had been connected since the 1470s. Guidoantonio Vespucci and Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco collaborated and led Florence's political and cultural scene in the 1490s. Both were interested in Lucretius's writings, geographical discoveries and politics, and they commissioned artworks that belonged to the same cultural milieu.

The Vespucci's activity in the 1490s shows how the family aimed to retain its predominant role in Florence: Guidoantonio, lawyer and ambassador of the Republic, and Antonio di Nastagio, notary of the *Tratte*, had a privileged control of the political and administrative sides of Florence's new government; Giorgio Antonio, friar of the convent of San Marco maintained an insight into the spiritual changes the city was undergoing with Savonarola; and Amerigo the explorer played a major role in fifteenth-century geographical discoveries, enhancing the reputation of the family. Following their personal inclinations and interest, which brought them to choose different occupations, the Vespucci strategically collaborated to ensure the family's appearance in the city and preserve its visibility: no matter what destiny the city's factions were going to face, the Vespucci had a family representative in the group that would prevail.

Family members made use of artistic patronage depending on their needs, transforming art into a powerful tool that prompted identification with specific groups and ideologies. Both Giorgio Antonio and Guidoantonio relied on Botticelli, an established artist with whom they had consolidated their friendship in the 1470s.

Remaining *super partes*, Botticelli worked on two very different commissions for two representatives of the same family: on the one hand, the paintings in the property in via de' Servi expressed Guidoantonio's oligarchic views; on the other hand, the decoration of the *Cappella della Misericordia* of the 1490s reflected Giorgio Antonio's religious beliefs, closely associated with the preaching of Savonarola. Art was strategically used 'in rivalry' by Vespucci family's members who stood in opposite factions: it linked them to the different groups they supported, but it also ensured the visibility of the family, bringing recognition to the whole lineage.

Conclusion

The investigation undertaken has deepened our comprehension of the Vespucci family, highlighted the family's social connections inside and outside of Florence, and reframed the meaning, commission, and execution date of selected artworks by Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and Piero di Cosimo. On a broader level, this study has expanded the current knowledge of fifteenth-century Florentine families and added new evidence to consider their artistic patronage.

From all angles, the evidence provided by the Vespucci supports Kent's theory on fifteenth-century broader kinship ties: individual members of the three Vespucci urban lines gained power and prestige, closely collaborating and sustaining one another to reach common aims. Following their personal inclinations, the Vespucci became ambassadors, notaries, teachers, doctors, churchmen, merchants, and navigators, marking their presence in the political, religious, and cultural spheres of Florence. The family's wealth and importance grew steadily from the 1470s and primary resources, such as letters, tax declaration, wills, and the inventory of 1479, provided an insight into the growth of the family's possessions. Family members owned properties and lands in and around Florence, and surrounded themselves with lavish objects, including fully furnished bedrooms, jousting apparatus, silver knives, rings, precious stones, majolica pieces, coral, amber, finely decorated manuscripts, and rich textiles. Wills witnessed that personal and domestic goods were passed down through the family, thus providing continuity between the generations.

Abundance of material culture was not restricted to within the walls of the Vespucci houses, but its spread inside and outside of Florence strengthened the family visibility and prestige beyond the boundaries of the *gonfalone* Unicornio. Vespucci manuscripts circulated across Medicean cultural circles; the family coats of arms were located in different areas of Florence and on the *Palazzi del Podestà* of nearby towns; and the involvement of family members in festivals, jousts, and

liturgical ceremonies allowed the family to gain honour and power across the city. This played an important role in the visual strategy of the family as the objects so far mentioned, inscribed with the Vespucci coat of arms, became the emblems of a powerful, well connected, and respectable family. This proves the Vespucci an elite family and a key presence within the Medici entourage. This is witnessed by the contacts the Vespucci established with the Medici's *amici* – including humanists and members of the Signoria - and the places where family members dwelled and where they directed their patronage - the Badia of Settimo, the Compagnia de' Magi, the Buonomini di San Martino, and convents such as Santa Maria degli Angeli and Le Murate.

Through the examination of the Vespucci's social network I was able to understand the family's interaction with the arts and to consider its role in fifteenth-century Florence. The Vespucci were among those Florentines who contributed the shaping of the city's art and culture. Travelling widely, family members shared a dedication for sailing, exploration, and discovery. Artworks proved that the family was at the forefront of Renaissance cultural exchange as the Vespucci were importers and exporters not only of artefacts, but also of culture and knowledge. On one hand the analysis of the family's possessions, from majolica pieces, to coral and amber, proved the Vespucci a family of means who used its wealth to commission and purchase objects that defined family's virtues, while marking friendships and alliances as in the case of gifts. This is the case of the Vespucci-Garazda manuscript and of the Botticelli panel given to Isabella of Castile. On the other hand, family members, variously interested in literature, religion, geography, astronomy, and the arts, forwarded Florence's reputation as a centre of learning across Italy and Europe. Giorgio Antonio, in particular, welcomed European humanists who travelled to Florence to study under his tutelage.

The examination of the Vespucci's history and artistic patronage has allowed me to revisit the chronology of selected works by Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and Piero di Cosimo. Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* was the first painting commissioned and

executed around 1477-1480. Around the same time Botticelli and Ghirlandaio worked in Ognissanti for the decoration of the family chapel and the church *tramezzo*. Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo's panels for the property in via de' Servi and the lost fresco for the arch of the *Cappella della Misericordia*, were all commissioned around 1499-1501.

In most respects, the Vespucci's activities are in line with those of other prominent Florentine families: they purchased properties; they were involved in mercantile, political, religious and cultural activities; they endowed chapels; they decorated their private properties with lavish objects; and they contributed to charitable and cultural initiatives. Just like others, the Vespucci gravitated around the Medici, whose favour, appreciation and support allowed the Vespucci to affirm themselves.

While engaging in customary activities that met the elite's expectations, the Vespucci also engaged in less obvious activities: they did not limit the purchase of properties to their neighbourhood, but they extended it to different areas of the city; they did not endow a family chapel, but they took over the entire church of Ognissanti; they did not simply travel abroad, but they were responsible for reaching and discovering new coasts of the New World; and although they maintained a friendly relationship with the Medici, the way they interacted with them was different. The inter-generational relationship with the Medici and their kin allowed the Vespucci to prosper, make their fortune, and affirm themselves within the city. Like other families of Florence, the Vespucci were aware of the Medici artistic tastes and cultural interest as their commissions and activities in Ognissanti demonstrated. However, while flattering the Medici by commissioning artworks that would have met their favour, the Vespucci moved independently, turning their attention to young artists.

What the Vespucci achieved in the *gonfalone* Unicorn in the period between 1470-1480 was unique for a 'new' family. The area around Ognissanti became a symbol of the Vespucci's civic virtues, prestige, and engagement with art

and culture: the patronage rights in Ognissanti marked the family's spiritual devotion; the hospital Santa Maria dell'Umiltà showed the Vespucci presence within the rich network of Florence's hospitals and the family's interest in charitable activities; and the theatrical plays in Ognissanti proved them to be among the pioneers of new cultural initiatives. This, together with the frescoes of Ognissanti, the decoration of its *tramezzo*, and the commission of *Mars and Venus* for one of the family's properties, became calculated means that permitted the Vespucci to construct and cultivate a precise public image of themselves, making them undisputed leaders of their neighbourhood. The *gonfalone* Unicorno was associated with the Vespucci; and vice versa.

The Vespucci became leading personalities in fifteenth-century Florence. The early contact they established with Botticelli and Ghirlandaio shows how the family was the first to adopt artists and typologies later on re-used by other patrons, thus suggesting the importance of the family in the development of Florentine art. Botticelli, having received commissions from members of the three lines of the Vespucci dynasty, appears to be the 'family painter'. As neighbours, friends, and ultimately patrons, the Vespucci could have indeed acted as sponsors of Botticelli across the Medicean intellectual circles. Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco was particularly influenced by the Vespucci's cultural and artistic choices. The close relationship between the young Lorenzo and the Vespucci, which started in the 1470s and persisted well into the 1490s, brought Lorenzo to embrace the Vespucci's taste as his commissions from Botticelli, to be dated after *Mars and Venus*, and in his interest for maps and geographical knowledge demonstrate.

The recognition, trust, and respect acquired in the period between 1470-1480 were certainly the basis of the power the Vespucci exerted in the last decade of the fifteenth century. As in the previous decades, Vespucci family members belonging to different branches strategically cooperated to maintain the family in power, collaborating to preserve the family's presence at the forefront of the political, religious, cultural spheres. In the 1490s, the Vespucci still featured as

political and spiritual leaders, but also as some of the possible promoters of new cultural tendencies. Art and architecture served once again the family's ambitions, assuring its visibility and manifesting its wealth and ideologies. A gap exists between the frescoes in Ognissanti (1480) and the panel paintings for the property in via de' Servi (end of the 1490s), and I have not identified artworks realised in the decade 1480-1490 that can be related to the Vespucci patronage. The difficulty pinpointing artworks commissioned by the family, however, does not mean that family members were not active patrons. Given that the Vespucci family reached its social peak in the second half of the fifteenth century, it seems unlikely that family members 'stopped' commissioning for over a decade. Reasons for this lacuna are likely to lie behind the lack of available documentation. Although archival evidence has not highlighted any possible path of investigation, it cannot be excluded that the recovery of insightful documents in the future will deepen our comprehension of the Vespucci patronage in the period 1480-1490.

The desire to emerge, the 'fluid' attitude towards the main branch of the Medici, and the long-lasting friendship with Lorenzo di Piefrancesco, question the nature of the Vespucci-Medici relationship. Were the Vespucci true supporters or strategic players? As for other Florentine citizens who demonstrated similar behavioural ambiguities, these questions are difficult to answer and we might never find out what were the real feelings the Vespucci had for the Medici.

In order to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this work about the role exerted by 'new' and patrician families over the arts and their conformity to the Medici tastes, it is necessary to reconsider the role of the Medici. As the evidence available suggests, it is not possible to forward the image of the Medici as the only family in charge of forwarding cultural developments within Florence. The previous chapters have shown that the Vespucci 'discovered' Botticelli and, possibly, Ghirlandaio in the 1470s. In this instance the Vespucci were leading the scene, presenting themselves as 'talent scouts' of refined taste. Given the difficulty of perceiving the developments of Florentine art as the result of the

patronage of one family only, I suggest that influences of taste travelled both ways. The activities and artistic patronage of the Vespucci, Medici, Sassetti, Tornabuoni, Strozzi, Soderini, Pucci, Lanfredini, Nasi, and Del Puglise, spoke for a common culture that everyone contributed to build and develop through their activity as patrons and collectors, and according to their means. Using art to shape identity and mark associations and distinctions, Florentine families enriched Florence through the importation and collection of artworks, the revival of classical past and chivalric aspects, and the promotion of local artists. My investigation into the Vespucci showed that the family's projects were loaded with meanings: they reflected contemporary cultural interests; they proposed new visual trends; they addressed the family's spiritual and political concerns; and they announced to a wide audience assertions about their wealth, status, networks, and ambitions.

What the Vespucci achieved through their art could have not been done without a dialogue between them and their artists. Although it is difficult to determine the respective responsibilities of the patron and the artist, family members seem to have played an important role in the decision-making process of their commissions. At the same time, however, the artworks considered also present elements which indicate the artists licence. This is the case, for instance, of the joking allusions made by Botticelli in *Mars and Venus* through the squirting cucumber. The Vespucci commissions were, therefore, the result of the close collaboration of the family and its artists: Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and Piero di Cosimo all succeeded in visually expressing their patron's desires, needs, and beliefs.

This study of the Vespucci has demonstrated that some aspects, here only marginally considered due to constraints of time and for thematic coherence, could benefit from further research. Of particular interest is the presence of maps within the Vespucci possessions, such as those included in Giorgio Antonio's manuscripts. As these manuscripts circulated in Medici circles, further investigation could attempt to evaluate their use, meaning, and the visual similarities that seems to

have existed between cartographic material and paintings. But there is more when it comes to expanding the research horizons. Some of the points made throughout this study regarding the importance achieved by the Vespucci, seem to be valid only when considering the history of the family in the Quattrocento, while a different scenario appears to have characterised the life of the Vespucci later on. Although this work deliberately focused on the fifteenth century, it now seems useful to give a brief mention of the fortune of the family during the Cinquecento and suggest paths for further research.

Personalities only marginally touched upon in this work seem to be a worthwhile focus of investigation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Simone di Giovanni shared a keen interest in the visual arts with his son Niccolò and his daughter Antonia. Their names can, in fact, be linked to painters and sculptors whose works have remained overlooked. Antonia commissioned the funerary monument for her husband Antonio Strozzi located in Santa Maria Novella. Of the artists in charge of sculpting the marble tomb, Tommaso Maso Boscoli, Andrea Ferrucci, and Silvio Cosini, the latter assisted Michelangelo in San Lorenzo during the realisation of the New Sacristy. Simone and his son Niccolò, Knight of Malta, had a particular interest in the visual arts and they displayed artworks in their property located in Santo Spirito next to Ponte Vecchio. In this house dwelled artists and humanists such as Vasari that, according to the extant documentation, were linked by close ties to the Vespucci.

Niccolò also maintained a close relationship with Ferrara, becoming close kin to Ippolito d'Este and Ludovico Ariosto. At the same time, his connection to the religious order of the Knights of Malta allowed him to establish contacts with Pope Clemente VII and Rome. This web of connections might be at the basis of Niccolò's portrait depicted by Parmigianino and of his inclusion in Giulio Romano's *Baptism of Constantine* in the Vatican. Furthermore Niccolò seems to have acted as the intermediary between Pontormo and Gino Capponi, having advised the latter to

employ the artist for the decoration of his family chapel in Santa Felicità.¹ These considerations, which have not previously been pulled together, are still overlooked and the study of Niccolò and Antonia's activity could shed light on their artistic patronage and value its conformity to the cultural tendencies undertaken in the early sixteenth-century by other prominent families.

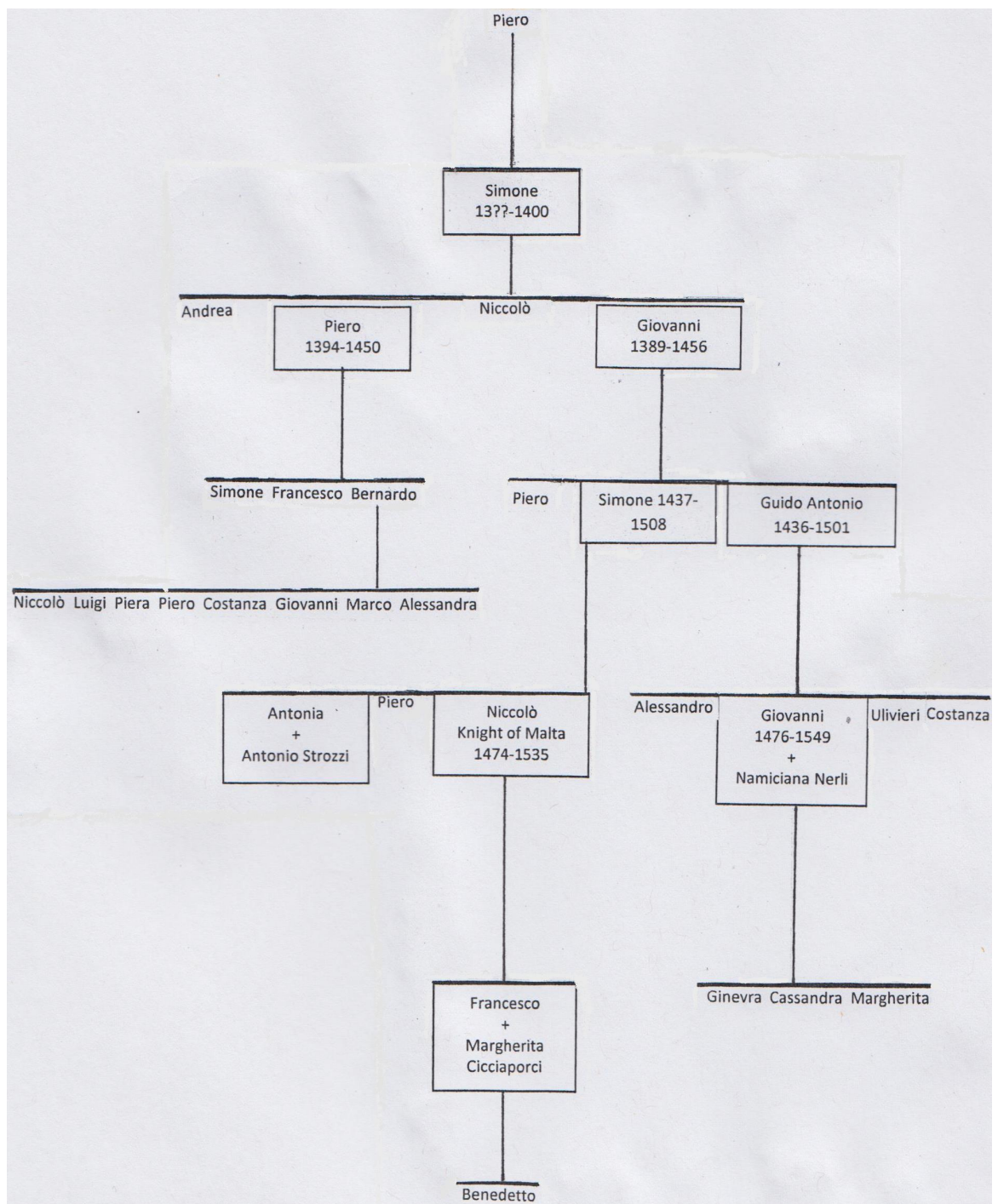
Antonia and Niccolò's predominant positions are unique in the Florentine artistic scene, and they do not find a parallel in the other lines of the Vespucci. From a preliminary survey of sixteenth-century documents, the family does not appear to have retained the prestige it had during the Quattrocento, as from the scant information consulted its members remain in the shadows of Florentine society. It is interesting to note that the name Vespucci does not feature in the Medici archival *fondo* of the sixteenth-century, the Mediceo del Principato, a fact which questions the relationship between the two families during the Duchy of Cosimo I and his sons. Moreover, as highlighted in Chapter 3, in this period the Vespucci chapels in Ognissanti were handed down to those families the Vespucci were linked to by marriage. Gradually losing their importance, the chapels were subjected to an irreversible process of decay: while the Marzi Medici covered the *Cappella della Misericordia* with a canvas representing St. Elisabeth of Portugal, the two chapels along the transept required major re-construction works. It is difficult to speculate on the reasons behind this sudden decline and more research into the lives and activities of the Vespucci in the sixteenth century is needed. In the Quattrocento, family members closely collaborated with one another, but did the same happen later on? Were the Vespucci able to maintain the same familial unity? The return of the Medici and the establishment of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in the sixteenth century altered the political and social scenario of Florence, and the strong presence of the Medici Dukes in Florence might have also contributed to overshadow the importance of the Vespucci. Further research into the Vespucci 'afterlife' would shed light on the sudden shifting that characterised the history of the family and to assess its position in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Florence.

¹ VASARI 1967, vol. 6, 168.

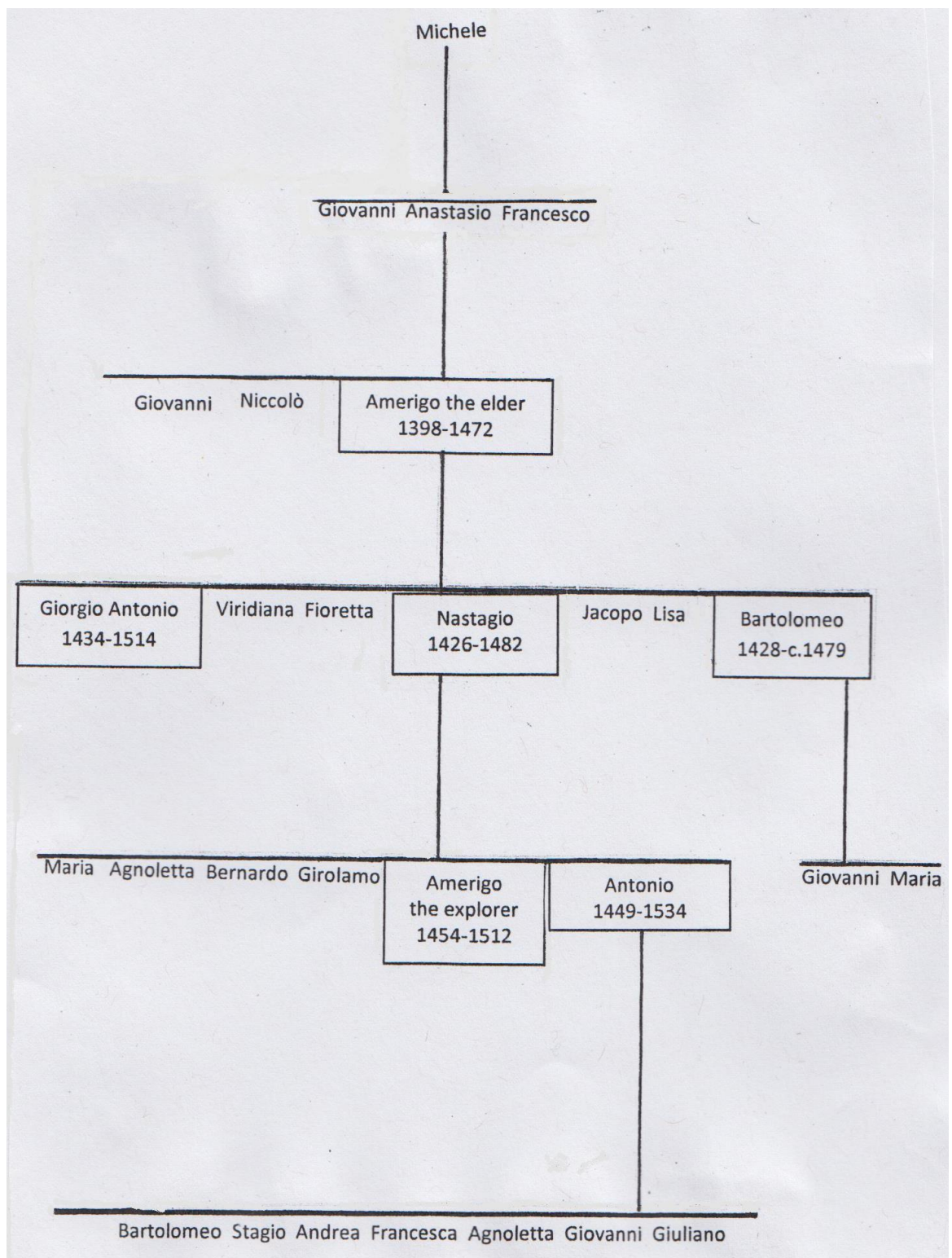
Moreover, this would permit us to consider if any connection can be established between the progressive fading of the Vespucci's fortunes and the contemporary doubtful considerations of Bartolomé de las Casas on Amerigo's travels, briefly discussed in the Introduction.

The Vespucci family is a compelling case study that offers a fresh perspective from which to view history and art history. The prominent positions held by its members permitted the steady development and transformation of the extended family throughout the Quattrocento, which today appears strongly embedded in the history of Florence. A family of cross-borderers and 'cosmopolitan wasps' who, from their *gonfalone*, moved outwards across Florence, Italy, and Europe, the Vespucci is a family who made its own fortune by carefully balancing family interests, friendships, alliances, and political strategies. The Vespucci used art and culture to promote themselves, shape their identity, affirm their social status, and spread the fame of the family. From Peretola to Florence, from the Arno to the Ocean, the Vespucci's growing ambitions were fulfilled at the end of the fifteenth century by Amerigo who, reaching the coasts of the New World, contributed to the final step of the Vespucci social and geographical expansion. With a continent – America - named after one of its members, the Vespucci's fame was projected to a global stage.

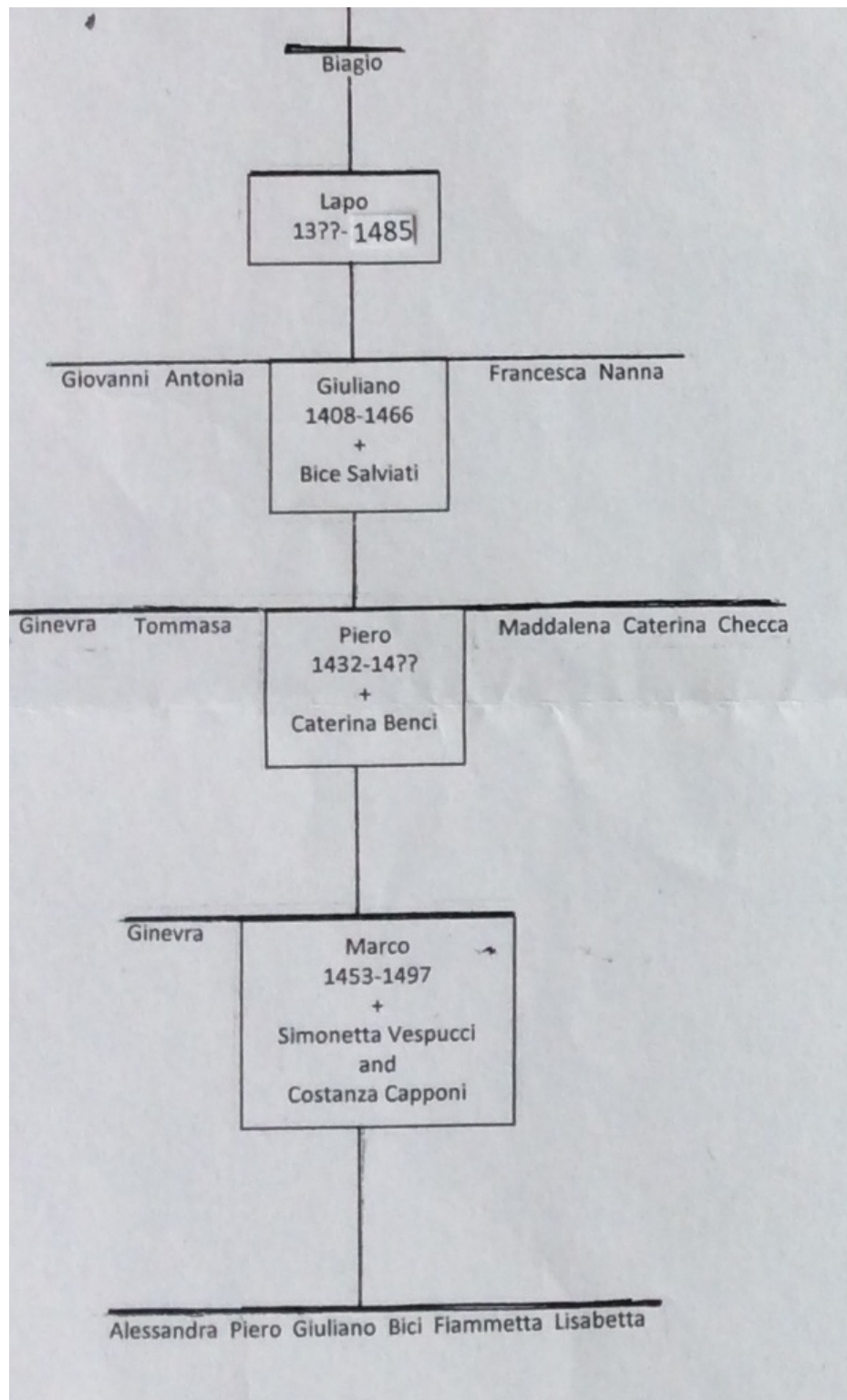
Appendix 1



Genealogy 2. The line of Simone di Piero Vespucci.



Genealogy 3. The line of Amerigo Vespucci the Elder.



Genealogy 4. The line of Giuliano di Lapo Vespucci

Appendix 2

Transcriptions

The following documents, retrieved from the State Archive and the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana of Florence, are unpublished. I have transcribed them according to guidelines of the Medici Archive Project of Florence: punctuation was added where needed and word contractions were completed. The latter are indicated by the presence of square brackets.

The words of which the sense was difficult to understand have not been transcribed. Instead, they have been replaced by three dots between square brackets. Given the length of the wills in Appendix 2, some parts have been omitted in order to provide the most meaningful passages that support my argument. Square brackets between paragraphs indicate that a passage is missing. The dots between brackets indicate that sentences are missing.

Document 1

ASF, NA 10094, ff. 331r-334v [Ser Paolo Grassi]

Giorgio Antonio's will, 15 May 1497

15 Mai 1497

Testamentum d[omi]ni Georgii Antonii de Vespucciis propositi florentini

In dei domine amen. Anno Incarnationis dominice millesimo quadringentesimo nonagesimo septimo, indictione XV, die vero quintodecima(sic) mensis Maii. Actum Florentie, in domo habitationis infrascripti testatoris, site in canonica cathedralis Florentine, p[rese]ntibus ibidem infrascripti testibus proprio ore infrascripti testatoris vocatis habitis et rogatis videlicet:

Ser Francisco Dominici Barth[o]l[om]ei de Monteviridi et Ser Juliano Francisci Johannis notariis florentinis; Paulo Pieri Pauli Filippi merciariorum; Antonio ser Joh[ann]is Altovanti; Antonio Pauli Pieri bastiero; Pierozo Martini Marci battiloro et Johanne Bernardi de Soli cimatore civibus florentinis.

Cum dies ho[r]is breves sunt dicente D[omi]no in Evangelio "Ideo estote parati, quia nescitis diem neque horam", et cum nihil sit certius morte et nihil incertius hora mortis; hinc est quod [...] ac venerabilis pater

D[omi]nus Georgius Antonius ser Amerigi de Vespucciis, prepositus maioris ecclesie florentine, sanus Dei gratia mente sensu visu intellectu, licet corpore languens, nolens intestatus decedere, verum salutis anime sue suorumque bonorum dispositionem salubriter providere per hoc suum presens nuncupatum quod dicitur sine scriptis testamentum, fecit condidit disposuit et ordinavit in hunc quod sequitur modum videlicet, habita tamen prius licentia infrascripta per agenda a venerabili viro d[omi]no Philippo de Alamannis decretorum doctore, canonico florentino [...] d[omi]ni Archiepiscopi florentini vicario generali, prout latius constat instrumento rogato per me Paulum Amerigi notarium infrascriptum sub die XXIII mensis aprilis proxime preteriti vel alio tempore veriori.

In primis quidem animam suam Omnipotenti Deo atque Beate Marie semper Virgini ac beatissimis Apostolis Petro et Paulo ac beatis Zenobio et Giorgio totique celesti curie paradisi humiliter et devote recommendavit. Et quando ex hac vita migrare contingerit, elegit et sepelli voluit in sepulcro canonicorum cathedralis ecclesie Florentine. Et in honorando corpus suum fieri voluit eo modo et forma et

impensis quibus cum honore Dei et sine onere conscientie melius et salubrious videbitur infrascripti suis heredibus: cum hac tamen conditione, quod si eisdem eius heredibus videbitur expendere usque ad summam florenorum quinquaginta largorum de auro in auro solus infrascriptus d[omi]nus Johannes, unus ex heredibus infrascriptis, teneatur solvere de suo proprio dictam quantitatem. Et si in dicta impensa fienda expensum fuerit ultra dictam quantitatem florenorum quinquaginta largorum et quod illud plus quod expensum et expositum fuerit, quod infrascripti eius heredes teneantur solvere et concurrere unusquisque ipsorum pro medietate, et quod unusquisque ipsorum in dicto pluri debeat concurrere pro medietate.

Item reliquit et legavit Opera S[an]c[t]e M[ari]a del Fiore de Florentia et nove sacrestie eiusdem eccl[esi]e et operi(sic) murorum civitatis Florentia, in totum, libras tres flor[enus] parvorum.

Item finivit absolvit et liberavit omnes et quos cumque attinentes parentes et coniunctos ipsius testatoris de omni et toto eo in quo et quibus ipsi et quilibet eorum tenentur et obligati sunt dicto testatori, quacumue de cause et occasione, usque in presentem diem.

Item voluit et mandavit quod infrascriptus ser Antonius de Vespucciis, unus ex heredibus suis, debeat dare et trader de suo proprio, immediate post mortem ipsius testatoris, Bernardo fratri dicti ser Antonii et filio se Anastasii ser Amerigi de Vespucciis et nepoti ipsius testatoris, unam clamidem nigram et unum caputium et unam tunicam et unum par caligarum et unum berectum etiam nigras et novos.

Item reliquit et legavit d[omi]no Joh[ann]e Barth[o]l[om]ei ser Amerigi de Vespucciis, canonico florentino eius nepoti, infrascriptas res et bona videlicet: uno lecto fornito di sacchone, materassa, coltrice et dua primacci; uno panno d'arazo fiorito, che fu di suo padre; uno coltrone, quattro paia di lenzuola a sua scelta, due guanciali d'arazo et quattro altri guanciali con fodere, a sua scelta; due paia di casse et la carriuola con suo fornimento; uno mantello di panno pagonazo con dua suoi cappucci; uno colle pancie et l'altro col taffetà; uno altro mantello monachino nuovo, col suo cappuccio foderato di pancie.

Item reliquit eidem d[omi]no Johanni ultra soprascriptas res et bona ad eiusdem d[omi]ni Joh[ann]is usum et pro suo uso solum et durutaxat et non aliter, infrascriptos libros, videlicet: tutti e testi di ragione canonica in migliore forma 1 bibbia in quattro volume con Nicolò de Lira; tutte l'opere dell'arciveschovo Antonino, in quattro volume cioè la somma; un'altra bibbia in uno volume, senza comento, notate di verzino in marginibus legata e miniata con canti d'ottone; 1 breviario legato a sua volta; la Pisanella; la Somma Angelica; Moralia Nicolai de Lira; Moralia Sancti Gregorii; l'Epistole di Sam(sic) Girolamo in due volume maggiori

legati et miniati con canti d'ottone; Augustino De Civitate Dei, qualunque vuole dei dua; Sermones et opuschula Augustine, San Tommaso, Contra Gentile miniato et legato, con canti d'ottone, coperto di cuoio giallo, 1 calice con la sua patera, nuovo, non con serrate(sic), con smalti di Nostro Signore, nostra Donna, San Giovanni, San Zanobi et San Giorgio; tutte le sue cotte da preti; tutte le cose che sono in casa di detto testatore da mangiare e da bere; 2 cucchiari d'argento coll'arme di Vespucci, che furono di detto Bartholomeo; l'anello d'oro fu di detto Bartholomeo intagliato 1 vespa coll'arme.

Item ultra predicta reliquit et legavit prefato d[omi]no Johannis florenos centum largos de auro in auro, existentes supra Monte Pietatis civitatis Florentie, quos florenos C possit et valeat ipse d. Joh[ann]es petere et exigere quando ipse Joh[ann]es expleverit murare et seu murari facere domum habitationis ipsius testatoris sitam in canonica florentina eo modo et forma prout ipse testator remansit in concordia cum ipso d[omi]no Joh[ann]e; videlicet extrahere schalas dicte domus extra dictam domum in sui beccategli di pietra, et facere unam camera terrenam et [...] puteum in grosseza et seu latitudine muri, et replere totam dictam domum omnibus rebus necessariis. Et factis predictis, tunc et eo casa possit esigere libere a dicto Monte dictos florenos centum largos; de quo quidem credito fuit et est penes ipsum testatorem quedam scripta privata subscripta manu officialium dicti Montis Pietatis et etiam apparet ipse testator creditor a entrata segreta dicti Montiis ad cartas 5. Et casu quo idem d[omi]nus Joh[ann]es non expleverit dictam domum eo modo et forma prout supra dictum est, tunc et eo casu ipse testator voluit quod ipse d[omi]nus Joh[ann]es nec aliquis aliquis possit petere et exigere dictam quantitatem et seu partem ipsius a dicto Monte Pietatis infra tres annos tunc proxime futuros a die mortis ipsius testatoris, nisi iam acciderit aliquis casus evidentis necessitatis approbandus a dictis officialibus Montis Pietatis ipsos esse coactos a necessitatibus, prout de omnibus dabitur notitia dictis officialibus.

In omnibus autem aliis [...] bonis mobilibus et immobilibus, fructibus, nominibus et actionibus presentibus et futuris, suos heredes universales instituit fecit et esse voluit prefatos d[omi]num Johannem Barth[olom]ei de Vespuccis canonicum florentinum, et ser Antonium ser Anastasii ser Amerigi de Vespuccis civem et notarium florentinum, nepotes ipsius testatoris et quemlibet eorum equis portionibus.

Cum hoc tamen onere, conditione et pacto videlicet, quod medietas molendinorum vulgariter detto le Mulina de' Consorti d'Ognissanti, pertinens et expectans ipsi testatori, pertineat et expectet dictis suis heredibus videlicet cuilibet ipsorum pro quarta parte, et post mortem dicti d[omi]ni Joh[ann]is dicta quarta pars eidem d[omi]no Joh[ann]i relicta et legatata reliquit et legavit prefato ser

Antonio ipso vivente seu autem filiis masculis legiptimis et naturalibus tam natis quam nascituris ex dicto ser Antonio. Et similiter casu quo idem ser Antonius decederet absque filiis masculis legiptimis et naturalibus et non aliter, tunc et eo casu dictam ratam dicto ser Antonio relictam eidem d[omi]no Joh[ann]i reliquit et pertinere voluit et mandavit. Et casu quo dicti d[omi]nus Johannes et ser Antonius, heredes instituti predicti, et filii et descendentes maschuli legiptimi et naturales dicti ser Antonii decederint non existentibus aliquibus ex dictis supra nominatibus, tunc et eo casu dictam medietatem dictorum molendinorum de' Consorti reliquit et legavit fratribus capitulo ex conventui Omnium Sanctorum de Florentia prohibens idem testator dictis suis heredibus et etiam dictis fratribus alienationem et donationem et distractionem dictorum molendinorum de' Consorti, et quod dicta bona non possint vendi alienari testari neque aliquem contractum facere. Et casu quo dicti eius heredes aliquem contractum facerent, tunc et eo casu reliquit dicta bona dictis fratribus capitulo et conventui Omnium Sanctorum de Flor[enti]a. Et casu quo dicti frates cap[itu]lum et conventus aliquem contractum facerent de dictis bonis, tunc et eo casu dicta bona reliquit et legavit canonicis et capitulo S[an]c[t]e M[ari]e del Fiore de Flor[enti]a. Cum hoc tamen onere et gravedine, quod dicti eius heredes et possessores dictorum molendinorum teneantur debeant et obligati sint dare solvere et pagare quolibet anno in perpetuum canonicis et cap[itu]lo maioris ecclesie florentine, post mortem ipsius testatoris, libras decem et octo solidorum parvorum, faciendo solutionem in tribus pagis, videlicet in festo S[an]c[t]i Georgii de mense aprilis libras sex, et alias libras sex solidorum parvorum de mense Junii in festo decem milia Martirum, et alias libras sex de mense octobris in festo undecim milia Virginum. Quas quidem festivitates canonici et cap[itu]lum maioris ecclesie florentine teneantur facere in diebus dictarum festivitatum debeant distribuere libras sex solidorum parvorum, videlicet in festo S[an]c[t]i Georgii in primis vespers libras tres et alias libras tres in missa maiori, et in aliis duabus festivitibus teneantur dicti canonici distribuere libras duas in primis vespers et in missa magna libras duas solidorum parvorum. Et casu dicti possessores dictorum molendinorum deficerent per duos annos continuos in non solvendo dictis(sic) libras XVIII per quolibet anno, ut supra dictum est, quod tunc et eo casu dicta bona reliquit et legavit dictis canonicis et cap[itu]lo dicte maioris eccl[es]ie florentine, dictas partes dictarum molendinarum de' Consorti, cum dicto onere faciendi dictas festivitates ut supra dictum est. Et casu quo dicti canonici et capitulum non observarent in non faciendo dictos festivitates cum dicta impensa, ut supra dictum est; quod tunc et eo casu dictas partes dictarum molendinorum de' Consorti reliquit et legavit hospitali pauperum S[an]c[t]e M[ari]e Nove de Flor[enti]a, cum dicto et cum illa impensa, prout et sicut supra dictum et expositum extitit. Et si casus evenierit quod dicta medietas molendinorum de' Consorti perveneant ad dictos frates et cap[itu]lum Omnium Sanctorum de Flor[enti]a eo modo et forma prout apparet nota et

scriptura in libro dictorum fratrum [...] revideatur et legatur dicta scriptura, declarando prout sunt pro dote iam [...] capelle de Vespucciis, site in dicta ecclesia, cui capelle tunc quotidie debeat celebrare(sic) una missa. Et etiam teneantur dicti fratres facere in dicta ecclesia quolibet anno in perpetuum, unum officium mortuorum ultra officium congregationis per eos fiendum. Et debeat revideri inventarium paramentorum pivialium planetarum et aliarum rerum appartenentium dicte capelle. Libros autem vulgares voluit idem testator pertinere et expectare dictis eius heredibus equis portionibus, excepto Dante scripto in membranis, ligato et cooperto de [...] giallo, cum bullectis octonis, qui liber Dantis debeat [...] [...] et incatenari in libreria canonice florentine.

De alis autem libris tam latinis quam grecis, voluit et mandavit idem testator quod infra XV dies immediate sequentes post mortem dicti testatoris, fiat et fieri debeat inventarium post mortem dicti testatoris, fiat et fieri debeat inventarium, de quo quidem inventatio una copia debeat esse et stare penes dictos eius heredes, et una alia penes fratres S[an]c[t]i Marci de Florentia, et una alia penes operarios opere S[an]c[t]e M[ari]e del Fiore de Florentia, videlicet de illis qui eunt consignari librerie canonice eccl[es]ie florentine. Cum pacto quod dicti libri tam latini quam greci nullo modo vendi vel alienari possint aut valeant, sed voluit et mandavit idem testator quod omnes illi libri ipsius testatoris quos indicaverint frater Dominicus de Piscia, frater professus in conventu S[an]c[t]i Marci, et d[omi]nus Joh[ann]es de Vespuccis et Ser Antonius heredes instituti predicti et duo ex eis in concordia, magis utiles et convenientes librerie S[an]c[t]i Marci florentini, et tam latinos quam grecos, debeant poni [...] et incatenari in dicta libreria S[an]c[t]i Marci predicti, infra unum mense tunc proximum futurum post mortem ipsius testatoris, et presertim illi qui deficerent in dicta libreria et seu magis utiles videbuntur pro dicta libreria. Et similiter dicti supra nominati et duo ex eis in concordia, debeant ponere et mictere et seu poni et [...] et incatenari(sic) facere in librerie canonice eccl[es]ie florentine, infra dictum tempus, et presentim illos libros deficientes in dicta libreria et seu magis utiles videbuntur pro dicta libreria. Ex quibus quidem libris voluit idem testator quod extrahantur XV volumina [...] et tradenda conventui Omnium Sanctorum de Flor[enti]a, videlicet illos libros magis convenientes dicto conventui. Ultra dictos XV libros voluit quod restituatur eisdem fratribus O[mn]ium Sa[n]c[t]orum quidam liber S[an]c[t]i Ieronimi in membranis super ethicam, quem relegari facit, qui fuit et est dicti conventus.

[...]

Volens et mandans idem testator omnibus singulis hominibus et personis penes quos reperientur dicti suprascripti libri, quod ipsi debeant commodare et commoditatem omnimodam facere dictos libros dictis suis nepotibus et eorum filiis

et descendentibus et attinentibus, et etiam nobilibus viris Laurentio et Johanni olim Pierfrancisci de Medicis et eorum filiis, et dicti libri non possint eis denegari, retinendo tamen per eos penes quos erunt bonum computum ex diligentem curam.

Executors autem p[rese]ntis testamenti et ultime sue voluntatis fecit et esse voluit [...] legum doctorem ac circumspectos viros D[omi]num Guidonemantonium de Vespuccis, advocatum florentinum et Laurentium et Joh[an]em Pierfrancisci de Medicis, cives florentinos in quos multum confidit et in deus ex eis in concordia.

Et hanc asservit esse et esse volle [...]

Rogans [...]

Document 2

ASF, NA 10094, ff. 346r-349r [Ser Paolo Grassi]

Giorgio Antonio's will, 23 March 1499

23 Marti 1499

Testamentum d(omi)ni fratris Georgiiantonii de Vespuccis

In dei nomine amen. Anno Incarnationis dominice millesimo CCCCLXXXVIII, indictione II, die vero vigesimo tertio mensis martii actum Florentia in conventu Sancti Marci florentini, presentibus ibidem infrascriptis tertibus proprio ore infrascripti testatoris vocatis habitis et rogatis vide licet.

Domino Marco Mactei de Strozis [...] frate Macteo Marcii de Florentia prior dicti conventus Sancti Marci ordinis predicatorum; frate Nicolao Caroli de Biliottis de Florentia; frate Benedicto Albertacci del Bene de Florentia; frate Honofrio Petri de Lachis de Florentia; frate Mattia Lotti de Salviatis de Florentia; frate Zenobie Raffaellis de Acciaiuoli set frate Roberto Laurentii de Strozis omnibus professis et in dicto conventu Sancti Marci de Florentia.

[...]

Dominus Georgius Antonius olim ser Amerigi de Vespuccis, prepositus maioris eccl(es)ie florentine hodie vocatus frater Georgius Antonius nondum professus ut

asservit in dicto conventu Sancti Marci [...] fecit condidit disposuit et ordinavit [...] in primis [...] corpus vero cum suis fratribus ordinis predicatorum de Observantia seppelliri voluit [...]

In expensis persolvendis pictori seu pictoribus arcus qui est vacuus sine pictura iuxta cappellam suam et suorum cum pictura conversionis, baptismi et martirii Sancti Dionysii areopagitae cum sancto Paulo Apostolo post disputationem et illuminationem [...], sicut cum Alexandro Botticello pictore constituerunt aut constituerint eius procuratores. Et quod ipsis cap[itolo] et fr[at]ibus tradantur vigintiquinque volumina in libraria Omnium Sanctorum cum catena [...] que pictura fieri debeat [...] ante festum O[mn]ium Sanctorum proximum eo pretio quod ultra predictos duodecim aureos restabit.

[...]

Cum hoc tamen onere [...] infra duos menses a die professionis faciente eiusdem testatoris, teneantur et debeant in perpetuum obligare per contractum dictam eorum partem cap[itolo] et canonicis S. Mariae del Fiore ut singulis annis ipsi cap[itolo] persolvantur decem et octo librae de fructu et proventu dictae partis, hoc est sex in festo Sancti Georgii martiris de mense Aprilis, ex sex de mense Junii in festo undecim milium Martirum, et sex de mense octobris in festo undecim milium Virginum, quae distribuantur hoc modo videlicet.

[...]

Item legavit supradictae cappellae Sanctae Mariae della Misericordia calicem unum novum, quem [...] fecit pro pretio sex florenorum largorum auri, cum figuris de smalto, videlicet D[omi]ni N[ost]ri Iesu [...], Beatae Marie, Sancti Johannis, S. Zenobii et Sancti Georgii, cum patera argentea deaurata ut fieri solet; qui calix nunc est apud Dominum Johannem eius nipotem, post eius tamen usum si eo uti velit

[...]

Item legavit triginta sextarios frumenti ad suam vitam singulis annis habere solet ab hospitali Sanctae Mariae Novae de Flor[enti]a quod duodecim sextarii singulis annis tradantur d(omi)no Johanni eius nepoti, et ser Antonio [...]

Item legavit et reliquit dicto Domino Johannis eius nepoti infrascripta bona videlicet. Una camera fornita cioè un lecto con saccone materassa, coltrice, dua primacci, un panno d'arazzo fiorito, uno coltrone, quattro paia di lenzuola a sua scelta, dua guanciali d'arazzo, et quattro altri guanciali con federe.

Un letuccio cum materassino, uno tappeto ad sua scelta, dua paia di casse et la carriuola con suo fornimento, un mantello di panno pagonazzo con dua suoi cappucci foderati uno con le pance, l'altro col taffetà, uno altro mantello monachino col suo cappuccio foderato di pance.

Item al dicto messer Giovanni la Bibbia di Niccolò de Lira, legata e coperta tutta in quattro volumi. Item un breviario grande da camera legato et ben miniato. E quali cinque volumi siano ad suo uso; et doppo suo uso o vita rimangino la Bibbia al convento di S. Marco, e 'l breviario si ponga incatenato in libreria di canonica o in sacrestia di S. Reparata.

Item omnia volumina seu libros suos [...] conventui fr[at]um predicatorum Sancti Marci [...] alia vero volumina [...] relinquit [...] fratum predicatorum cap[itul]i conventus Sancti Marci, ut [...] supradixi, eligantur distribuendo ac liganda in libreria cap[itul]i Omnium Sanctorum, iudicio et electione ipsorum procuratorum vel maioris eorum partis praesertim qui in eorum libreria non essent, modo non possint neque teneantur minui libri quod nominatim tradidit conventui S. Marci.

[...]

Item conventui Sancti D[omi]nici ad Fesules legavit quamtumque pecuniae frater Dominicus de Piscia, olim prior eiusdem conventus in edificando expenderit, sibi frate Dominico [...] testatore in depositum traditae. Item unum volumen Plinii impressum ligatum et miniatum, et alia volumina ut patri priori S. Marci videbitur, post illas duos distributiones cap[itul]o omnium sanctorum et cap[itul]o S. Maria del Fiore.

Item conventui S. Mariae del Saxo legavit horologium unum ex ferro et orichalcho et excitatorium cum capsula et campana et suis pertinentis. Item unum volumen S. Augustini, De Civitate Dei, impressum ligatum et miniatum [...]

Heredes vero suos universales omnium suorum honorum instituit ex una parte D. Johannem eius nepotem ex Barptolomeo [...] et Ser Antonium [...] Amerigum et Bernardum [...] filios olim ser Anastasii de Vespuciis eius nepotes [...]

Procuratores actores et exequutores pr[ese]ntis testamenti fecit et esse voluit R(everen)dum patrem priorem conventus S. Marci de Flor[enti]a d. Johannem et Ser Antonium, predictos eius nepotes [...] D. Guidumantonium de Vespucciis et Laurentium Pierfrancisci de Medicis, et maiorem eorum concordantium partem, ad procurandum agendum et exponendum et exequutioni mandandum o[mn]ia in supradicto testamento.

Document 3

ASF, NA 10094, ff. 350 r-v [Ser Paolo Grassi]

Giorgio Antonio's will, 24 May 1499

24 Mai 1499

Codicillum D. Georgiiantonii de Vespuccis

In dei nomine amen. Anno incarnationis dominice millo CCCLXXXVIII, Indictione II, die vero XXIII mensis martii. Actum Florentie, in p[ro]p[ri]o S[an]c[t]i Pauli Floren[tiae], presentibus ibidem infrascripti testibus proprio ore infrascripti codicillatoris vocatis habiti vocati[sic] et rogati videlicet:

Fra Daniele Antonii de Florentia professo in conventu S[an]c[t]i Marci de Flor[enti]a Johanne Tommasii Guiducci, veturale de Montecarulo Taddeo Barth[olom]ei Francisci p[ro]p[ri]o S[an]c[t]e Lucie O[mn]ium S[an]c[t]orum de Flor[enti]a Macteo Francisci Dominicii [...] dicti p[ro]p[ri]o S[an]c[t]e Lucie, et Iacobo Michaelis, fanciulo d[omi]norum florentinorum.

Cum voluntas hominis usque ad mortem sit ambulatoria et liceat de bono in melius reformare corrigere addere et rimuovere. Hinc est quod venerabilis pater.

D[omi]nus frater Georgius Antonius olim ser Amerigi de Vespuccis, nondum professus in dicto conventu S[an]c[t]i Marci de Flor[enti]a, sed de proximo emictere et facere professionem in dicto conventu Sancti Marci: sanus Dei gratia mente sensu corpore visu et intellectu, asserens et affirmans qualiter de dicto anno millo CCCCLXXXVIII, Indict[i]one II et die XXIII p[rese]ntis mensis martii, suum quod dicitur sine scriptis condiderit testamentum prout supra constat manu mei notarii infrascripti, per quod plura legata fecit. Et addens legato facto fr[at]ibus cap[ito]lo et conventui O[mn]ium S[an]c[t]orum de Flor[enti]a de quadam parte molendinorum consortium pro parte dotis cappelle quam in ecclesia O[mn]ium S[an]c[t]orum habet, videlicet quod dicta capellania denominari debeat capella Virginis Marie della Misericordia, cuius festivitas sit et esse debeat die Nativitatis eiusdem Virginis, et ibidem missa et vespera solempniter decantentur.

Et volens ordinare missas que ibidem celebrari debent, declaravit et voluit quod omnibus diebus festivis et secunda et quarta feria et sabato ibidem missa adminus una celebrentur, et singulis annis anniversarium mortuorum de mense novembris cuiuslibet anni, incipiendo quando de dicta parte molendinorum liberum et integrum percipient fructum fecent predictorum cum illis missis et cum et prout et sicut preposito et fr[at]ibus dicti conventus libere videbitur et placebit. Eisdem reliquit et legavit loco [...] lib. XII, quas dictus testator superioribus annis persolvere

[...] et etiam vigore legati facti per ser Amerigum patrem ipsius testatoris capelle predicte. Prohibens et vetans dictus testator per dictos fr[at]es cap[itu]lum et conventum nihil ulterius petere posse tam preferiti quam futuri temporis, ita quod predictis sint contenti.

Item voluit et declaravit quod omnes libri tam obligati quam liberi, sint et esse debeant ad usum et pro uso Bath[olom]ei filii ser Antonii eius nepotis et aliorum suorum nepotum studere volentium secundum eorum facultates quibus denegari nullo modo possent pro usu ipsorum tantum et non aliter.

Item reliquit legavit et declaravit quod prior et frates S[an]c[t]i Marci de Flor[enti]a teneatur debeant et obligati sint facere quolibet anno de mense Julii per tempus et terminum XXX annorum, pro a[n]i[m]a sua et suorum defunctorum, unum officium mortuorum cum illis missis cera et aliis, prout videbitur priori et fr[at]ibus dicti conventus. Et ultra predicta, teneantur et debeant dicti frates facere in dicta eccl[es]ia quolibet anno iniperpetuum(sic) solempniter tres festivitates, videlicet S[an]c[t]i Georgii, Decemmilium Martirum, et Undecimmilium Virginum, in diebus festivitatis ipsorum; et si dies ipsa erit aliqua solempnitas que pretermitti non poterit, talis festivitas debeat fieri sequenti die.

Cetera autem in dicto testamento per eum facta et gesta approbavit et confirmavit in omnibus et per omnia, prout in dicto testamento continetur et fit(sic) mentio.

Rogans [...]

Document 4

ASF, Corp. Sopp., 74, 101, I, ff. 42r-43v.

Inventory of Bartolomeo di Amerigo Vespucci, 18 July 1479.

Inventario in casa che fu di Bartolomeo di Ser Amerigho Vespucci

In nella prima cassa acanto al lectuccio

In prima lenzuola sei buone nella camera a terreno

Item sei isciughatoi tre grossi et tre da cappellinaio

Item una tovagliuola capitata et dua tovagliolini capitati

Item due camicie tagliate nuove da donna

Una cassetina in nella detta cassa dentrovi queste cose cioè

Tre fette da donna una broccato d'oro l'altra broccato d'ariento l'altra di seta bianca e rossa

Item una cintoletta verde col puntale et spranghe

Item una ... di domaschino bianco et verde

Item uno fazzoletto buono. Item uno isciughatoio da cappellinaio. Item panno due braccia o circha. Item uno drappo rosso con quattro bottoni d'oro. Item taffetà azurro. Item due libracciuoli da donna uno colla vesta di panno et l'altro senza vesta. Item uno paio di coltellini colla ghiera d'ariento da capo. Item tre isciughatoi bambagini nuovi. Item due pezzi di velo di seta. Item ventiquattro braccia di pannello grosso. Item in uno ... Una filza dambre nere. Item una matassa di bambagia filata. Item una matassa di bambagia filata. Item sei matasse di ... grosso. Item due fodere da guanciaie. Item sei isciugatoi bambagini grandi et piccoli. Item uno veletto di seta et uno di ... [carta rovinata]. Item una cintoletta verde bruna fornita d'ariento. Item tre chuchiai d'ariento. Item uno bussoletto dentrovi tre pietre due azzurre e l'altra ... Item uno anello da cucire d'ariento. Item uno ... con uno agnus deo d'ariento dorato. Item tre vezzi di coralli rossi con due crocette una d'oro et l'altra d'ariento.

Item in nella seconda cassa cinque scatole dentrovi piu zacchere. Item in nella terza cassa uno gamurrino bianco vecchio da donna. Item tre [farsetti] ... Et una coppa vecchia da huomo.

Item in nel lettuccio a chassa in supra detta camera terrena tre berrette rosate doppio ... Uno paio di maniche da donna di raso verde. Una berretta bianca.

Uno ... apicciolato tessuto chome brociati

Una tovaglia capitata fine

Due tovagliuole capitate in un filo grosso.

Nove benducci in un filo da donna grossetti.

Diciassette tovagliolini in un filo

Quattro sciugatoi dal lettuccio

Tre sciugatoi da capellinaio.

Dua sciugatoi da capo in uno filo.

Tre bandinelle nuove.

... (venti) ritagli di panno nero e pagonazo.

Tre ... da capuccio ...

Item uno forzieretto allato a luscio dentrovi quattro coppa da huomo di panno bigno. Item una cioppa di panno nera da huomo. Item una giacheta ... paghonazza da donna. Item una gamurra dicorata colle maniche di raso paghonazzo. Item una cioppa di bigio fiandrescho da donna. Item una cioppa monachina da donna buona. Item una giachetta di ... nera da donna. Item sette braccia di ... azurra. Item uno mantellino tragittato foderato di pelle da fanciugli piccoli. Item tre tappeti(i).

In camera alpari [suggested reading: al pari] della sala. In primo una gamurra di panno paghonazzo con uno paio di maniche di raso verde usata. Item una gamurra di panno pagonazzo colle maniche di monachino usata. Item una giachetta di boccaccino nera usata. Item uno mantellino di verde bruno usato soppannato di panno bianco. Item uno paio di calze di perpignano usate da huomo. Item uno cappuccio paghonazzo da huomo. Item una pezza di panno ... pratese di braccia nove o circha . Item due berrette nere usate et uno berrettino rosato uso. Item una

cioppa nera usata da donna. Item uno vestito di panno paghonazzo da huomo. Item più altri panni cioè (v)estiti ... piccoli.

Una cassa in camera di sopra. In prima in una cassa trentatre pezzi di maioliche piccoli et grandi. Item in una cassa quaranta pezzi di stagno piccoli et grandi. Item uno mantello monachino da huomo usato. Item uno lucchetto nero usato. Item uno paio di calze da perpignano usate da huomo. Item tre cappucci usati due dicorato et uno di monachino. Item uno berrettino dicorato uso. da huomo. Item una berretta doppia dicorata buona. Item uno guardanappe verde foderato di pelle da donna. Item una gamurra di rascia bigia usata. Item uno coopertoro bianco dalletto uso. Item uno ... azurra. Item uno panno d'arazzo.

Uno cassone dentrovi dieci tovaglie et due guarda nappe. Item dodici tovagliolini usati. Item sette ... Item sei tovagliolini usati. Item dieci canovacci da mano. Item tre lenzuola usate. Item uno isciughatoio grosso. Item una cioppa di paghonazzo foderata di pelle.

In cucina tre catini di rame. Item quattro padelle di ferro et di rame. Item quattro paiuoli di rame, tre buoni et usati. Item due teglie di rame. Item tre paia ... di ferro. Item tre ... di ferro. Item due paia di ... Item tre forchette da fuogho. Item tre palette da fuogho. Item una graticola. Item otto ... Item quattro ramaiuoli buoni. Item cinque candelieri d'ottone. Item due grattugie di ferro. Item due coltelliere vecche l'una con quattro coltegli e l'altra con sette coltegli. Item uno bacino, d'ottone una secchia appicchata all'acquaio. Item due secchi da pozzo colla chatena al pozzo. Item uno secchione d'acquaio si presto a mona maddalena. Uno scaldaletto di rame et uno ramaiuolo di rame da buchato. Una guarda nappa usata. Una ... da asciughare le mani. Tre lenzuola ... usate. Uno panno dalletto [suggested reading: da letto] di ... Sei tovagliolini usati. Due federe da guanciali con nappe et reticelle. Uno mazzo di camicie vecchie da donna numero dieci. Quattro pezze lana pigella da bambino, una tovagliola capitata con ... et et[sic] buchi. Septe camicie vecchie [...]. Uno sciughatoio grosso da lectuccio. Due paia di [...]. Una colte ... nuova con suoi ... nuovi. Una ... vecchia con suoi ... vecchi. Septe guanciali [...] una coperta di seta. Uno coltrone nuovo vecchio. Una ... bianca. Uno copertone azurro e bianco. Uno tappeto vecchio [...].

Appendix 3

Document 1

Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham, 1841, I, 212-213, unnumbered *folio*, v-r.

Letter sent by Piero Vespucci to Benedetto Dei, 11 November 1475.

Yhs A di XI di novembre 1475

Benedetto mio amato. A di pasati ebi una tua lettera, la quale dimostra grande afezione verso di me. Visto l'oferta di andare a l'Acquila e fare e dire per me ogni chosa di che asai ti grazio e ubrigliato ti resto. Ed io sarò a Firenze infra otto giorni e saprò quello m'ò a fare, che Lorenzo mi ha cienato ched io farei meglio starmi. Avendo a andare, piglierò buona ... in te chome so che posso e chome puoi tu verso di me.

Tu ci hai lasciato di nuove, se non che Acierito pure mi ha raguagliato de' fatti di Francia e [si] no sono quelli di Tomaso, e a lui mi rachomando.

Arai inteso el Salviato ha avuto la posisione de l'arcivescovado di Pisa. El papa ha chonciesso a' fiorentini ponghino 30 ducati a' preti, che Benedetto sia el papa, e a promesso de primi chardinali fare uno fiorentino.

Del Turcho non ci è nulla a la Moria. El tuo Francescho di Bettino fu chondanato, chome sai in 400 duchati.

Noi siamo usciti d'uficio e non abbiamo avuto uno minimo libello e siamo molto acharezato(sic) che ci manca di alla settimana andare a chonvito disteso e saracci dato e doni degniamente, ringraziato Dio.

Messer Francescho Bandini a protettore è huomo da bene: olli detto sia techo, perchè avendo a fare chostà nulla, lui sarebe uno pescie fuori de l'acqua. Falli chonpagnia in quello puoi.

So Lionardo verrà infra 12 o 15 di chostì a ogni modo. Lui ha avuto un pocho di ... e a pieno t'aviserà di tutto.

Sono tuo a ogni modo. Rachomandami al capitano di chastello e agli altri a chi ti pare. Idio ti guardi.

Tuo Piero Vespucci in Bologna.

Verso. Spettabili viro Benedetto Dei in Milano. Da Messer Piero Vespucci.

Document 2

Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham, 1841, I, 214-217, unnumbered *folio*, r-v.

Letter sent by Piero Vespucci to Benedetto Dei, 21 November 1481.

Yhs A di XXI novembre 1481.

Amatissimo Benedetto. Io ti ho scritto a pieno e questa per pregharti che ti piaccia voler fare pigliare quello Bernardino mio spenditore, perchè mi ha fatto mille danni e verghogna.

A presso di preghio mi vogli trovare uno chuocho che vogli fare pane e sappi chuociere e sia leale e sono a buon merchato. Se quello dello inbasciadore potessi avere, aspetterei uno mese: sappi tu se si può avere alla buon'ora. Non si potendo, fa io n'abi uno, che non potrà essere che buono per le tue mani.

Avisa se Portinari hanno avuto le chandelle, e avisa se sono buone e belle.

Se hai altro di nuovo, daciene aviso. Madonna Bianca ha preso tutti e poggi infino in sulle porte di Lugliano.

Avisa se parte Madonna del S. Ruberto.

Fa di dire alla M. Madonna di Messer Ghuasparre conciare quelle due pelle d'osso, aciò non si ghustino, e ch'io ne fo conciare de l'altre.

Rachomandami a lo inbasciatore e dilli aspetto risposta.

Sono tutto tutto a' chomandi tua, e Madonna e ... ed io ci raccomandiamo a te. Racomandami a Portinari.

Madonna ti priegha ti piacci solecittare al Gianotto abi quello lino e avisi di chosto e speso: tutto si pagherà soprattutto s'abi presto. Arai la grazia delle donne facendo abino lino. Idio ti guardi.

Tuo P. Vespucci a Lugliano.

Verso: Spettabili viro Benedetto Dei in Milano. Da Messer Piero Vespucci Capitano.

Document 3

Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham, 1841, I, 211, f. 263r-v.

Letter sent by Piero Vespucci to Benedetto Dei, 5 September 1475.

Caro et mio amato Benedetto. Certamente e sono infinite le obligationi che ho cum techo, et continuamente accrescano perchè se non fussi tu, sarei come salamandra fuori del foco.

Le nuove assai che mi dai per due tue lettere alle quali prima non ho facto risposta, mi sono assai care et habbi per certo che in pochi luoghi le puoi mandare che sieno più accepte et più stimate et che più repute sieno et maggiore honore te ne sia facto. Conosco et manifestamente si dimostrano essere di Giovanni e di Thomaso et maximo venendo dalla gran casa la quale non si avilupa come molti cervelli sanesi fanno.

Io ho quelle manifestate et lette dinanzi al Reverendo Monsignore locotenente nel Reggimento, allo Illustre S. Roberto, al Segatore et Maestro della Bottega qui et in molti altri luoghi. Et ad tutti sono state molto accepte et grate. Et pertanto ti priego al tinuare che mi sarà piacere singularissimo, et continuare cresceranno li oblighi et la reputatione.

Intesi della Ambrosina ex di Bartholino Thedaldi quanto era infino allora: non so che affecto haverà di poi havuto. Ho inteso dire, benchè sia proverbio materiale che chi fa mestieri fa la zuppa nel paniero et chi non sa ... guasta la pelle. Benaggia adunque la festa del Carmine che non si va a simili pericoli. Assai meglio saria incerato lo spago, che ègiuoco più sicuro et senza pericolo. Saranno caro intendere come di poi el caso è seguito acciò che io possa qualche remedio darti.

Non mi occorre per la presente altro, se non che infallante io t'aspetto in questa giostra: et ti prometto di trattarti et tenerti in sulle porcelline. Saracci da fare la festa di Sancto Spirito, del Carmine et da dare fuoco al cerchio et da mandare gli angeli giù per le funi et da fornire la rugola el palchetto et non già di calpestoni, nè da spiccare le melagrane dal palcho ma cose da mangiare l'osso et ogni cosa, come so che piacciono ad te.

La nuova di cassa è verissima et senza dubio alcuno, che così ne ho nuove da Napoli, da persona degna di fede. Non so che altro dire se non che sono a comandi et

piaceri tuoi pregandoti che quando ti occorre mi vogli spendere per quanto vagl(i)o con uno amico insieme. Ricorderati fare le mie raccomandationi al nostro padre Accirito et benchè prima lo dovessi dire al nostro ... oratore Donato Acciaiuoli et ... ad tutti li amici nostri. Bononie 5 settembris MCCCCLXXV.

Salutai Ser Leonardo come avisasti. Lui per mille volte a te si raccomanda. Petrus Vespuccius eques et Bononie potestas.

Verso: Spectabili viro tanquam frati carissimo Benedicto de Deis de Florentia Mediolani. Da Messer Piero Vespucci.

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Corporazioni Soppresse dal Governo Francese

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Decima Repubblicana

Decima Granducale

Deputazioni sopra la nobiltà di cittadinanza

Ceramelli Papiani

Magistrato dei Pupilli avanti il Principato

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Illustrations



Figure 1. Johannes Stradanus, *Amerigo Vespucci* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Palatino 75, f. 99) c. 1580. Pen, brown ink, black pencil, heightened with white. 230 x 309 mm.



Figure 2. Mickey Mouse, *The Discovery of America* (Walt Disney 1983).



Figure 3. Omar Ronda, *Marilyn + Simonetta* (2009). Mixed technique. 120 x 120 cm.



Figure 4. German Arciniegas's index cards in the "Vespucci Family Papers" archive (Washington DC, Library of Congress. Manuscript Division).



Figure 5. Vespucci Genealogical Tree (Florence, ASF, fondo Pucci. Unnumbered folio)



Figure 6. Vespucci Genealogical Tree (Florence, ASF, *fondo Pucci*. Unnumbered folio)



Figure 7. Detail of Figure 6. Background landscape.



Figure 8. Detail of Figure 6. The foreground building.

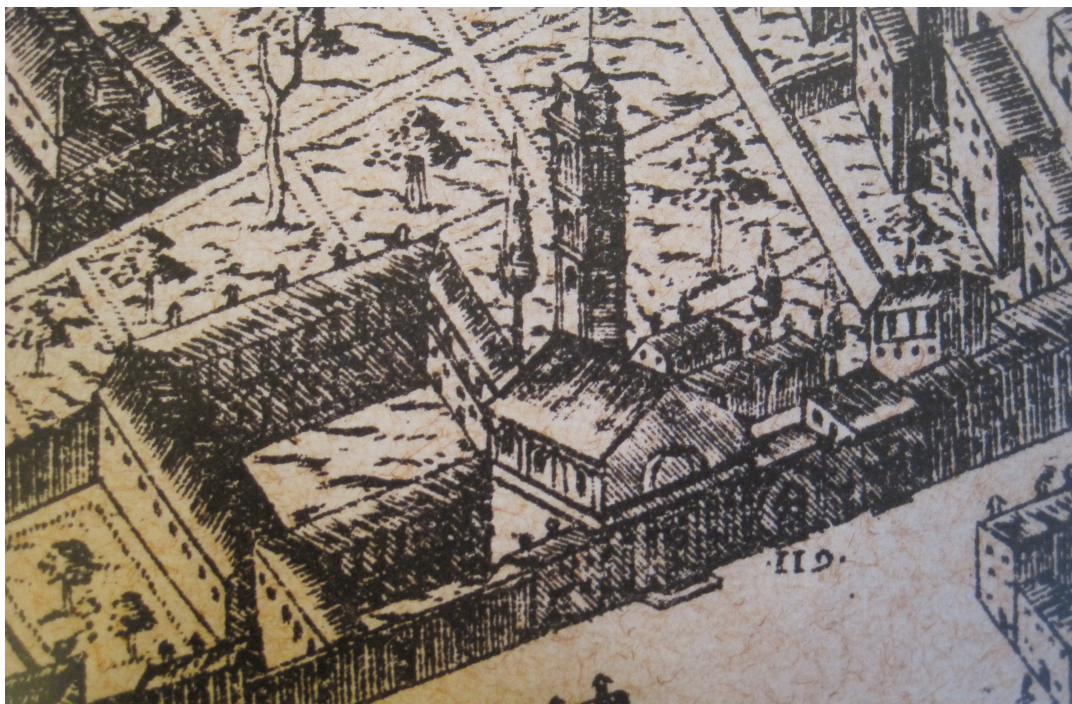


Figure 9. Stefano Buonsignori, *Map of Florence*. Detail of the church of Ognissanti in the *gonfalone* Unicorn of Florence (Florence, Museo di Firenze com'era). 1583-1584. Ink on paper, 143 x 131 cm.



Figure 10. The façade of the church of Santa Maria in Peretola.



Figure 11. Detail of Figure 6. The Vespucci family genealogical tree.



Figure 12. Giambologna, *Statue of Ferdinand I* (Piazza Santissima Annunziata, Florence)
Detail: Plinth decorated with bees placed in a spiral arrangement.



Figure 13. Vespucci emblem on the Strozzi-Vespucci funerary monument (Florence, Santa Maria Novella).



Figure 14. Vespucci manuscript with coat of arms. Conv. Sopp. I, IV, 4. San Marco 255 (Florence, BNCF) c.1499.



Figure 15. Vespucci coat of arms above the entrance of Villa la Sfacciata (Florence).



Figure 16. Vespucci coat of arms on the Palazzo Pretorio of San Giovanni Valdarno.

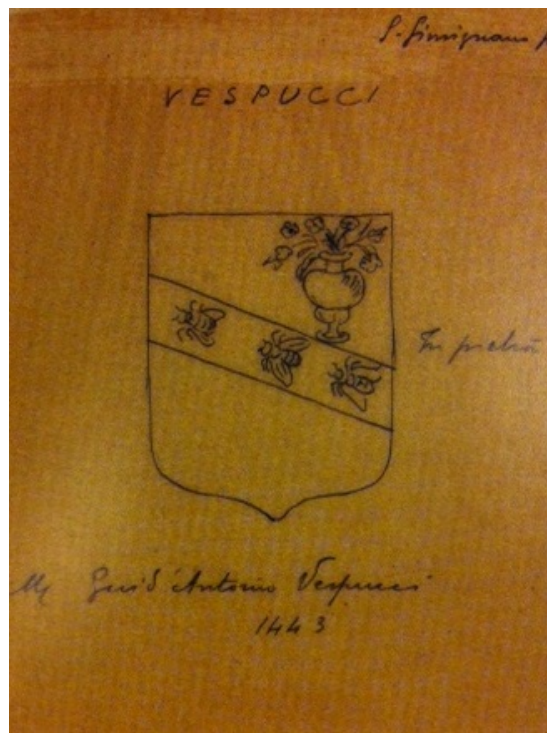


Figure 17. Vespucci coat of arms. Example of the one belonging to Guido Antonio Vespucci in San Gimignano (Florence, ASF, Ceramelli Papiani 4855, f.38).

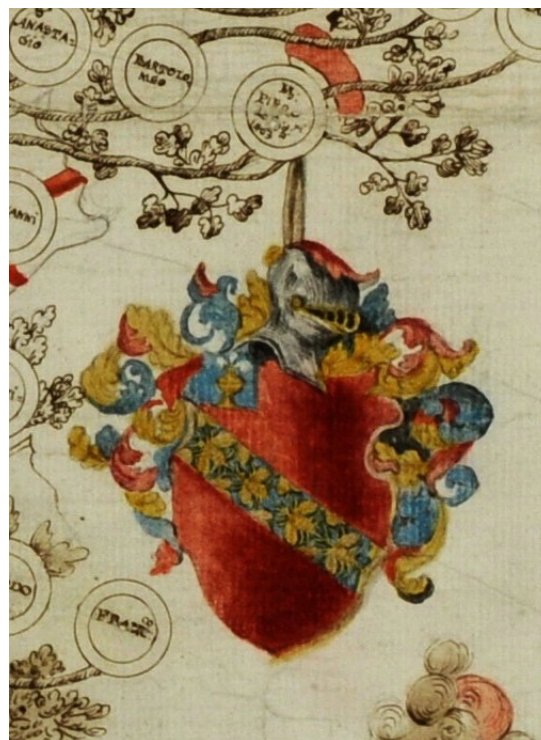


Figure 18. Detail of Figure 5. Vespucci coat of arms with the vase of flowers granted from Alfonso V of Aragon to Giovanni di Simone Vespucci.



Figure 19. Detail of Figure 5. The Vespucci eagle.



Figure 20. Detail of Figure 5. The façade of the Vespucci hospital.



Figure 21. Parmigianino, *Portrait of a Knight of Malta possibly Niccolò Vespucci* (Hannover, Niedersächsischen Landesgalerie) c. 1526-1527. Oil on poplar, 68 x 54 cm.



Figure 22. Giulio Romano, *The Baptism of Constantine* (Rome, Vatican) c. 1520-1524. Fresco. Detail of Niccolò Vespucci.

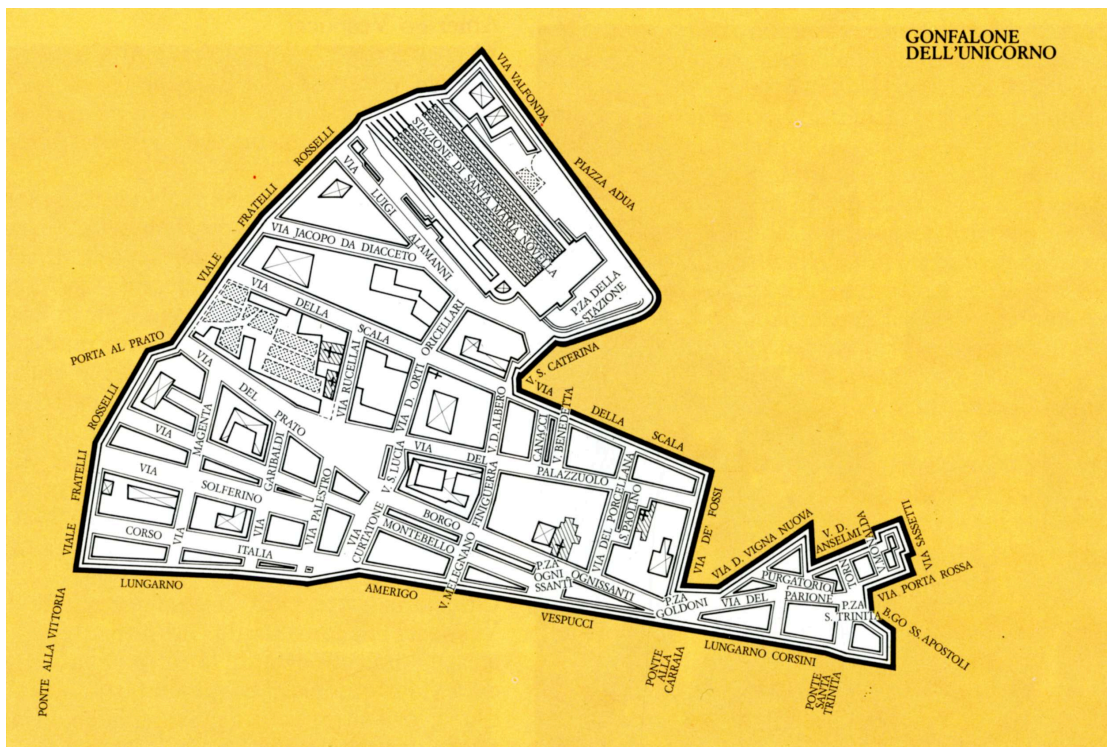


Figure 23. Close-up of the *Gonfalone Unicorno* (source: CIABANI 1992).

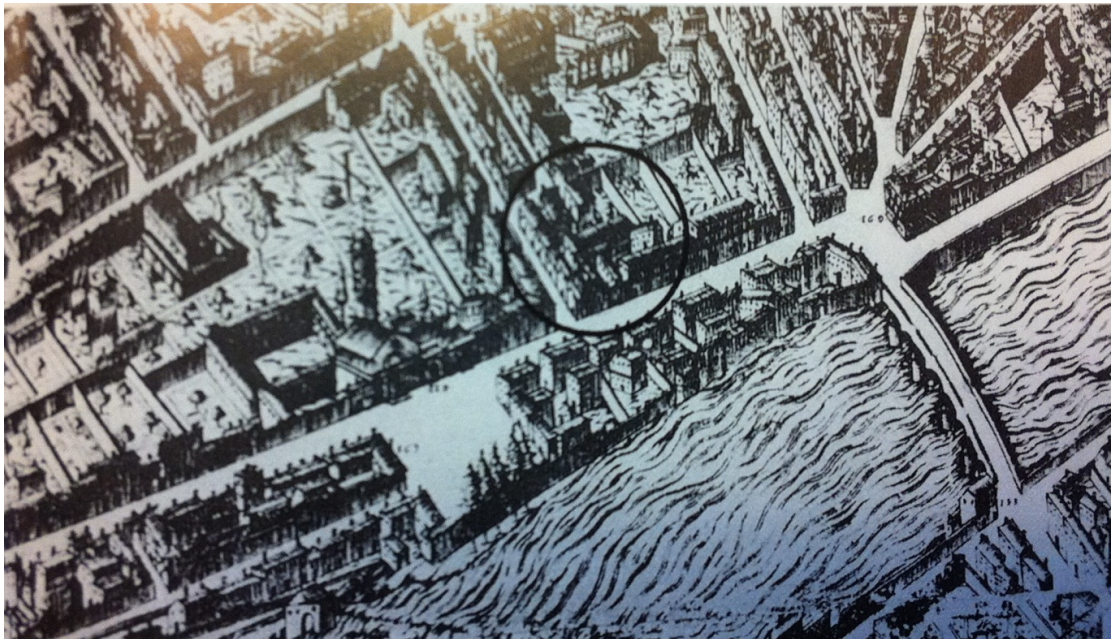


Figure 24. Stefano Buonsignori, *Map of Florence* (Florence, Museo di Firenze com'era). Detail of the *gonfalone* Unicorno. In the circle: the Vespucci s hospital. 1583-1584. Ink on paper, 143 x 131 cm.

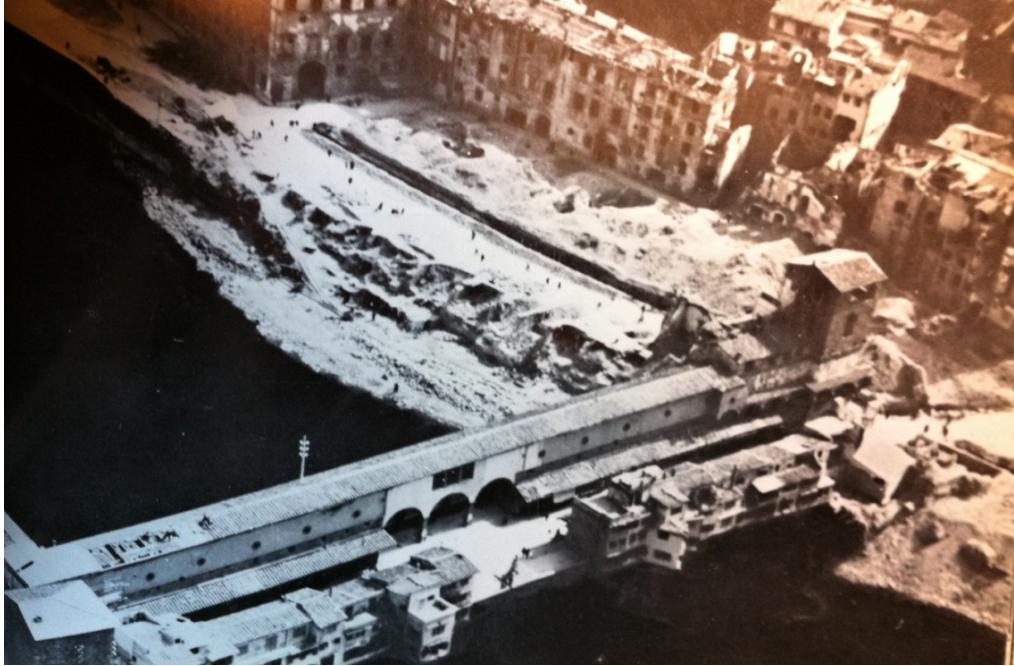


Figure 25. Ponte Vecchio and the surrounding area in 1944 during the Second World War (source: DETTI 1977).



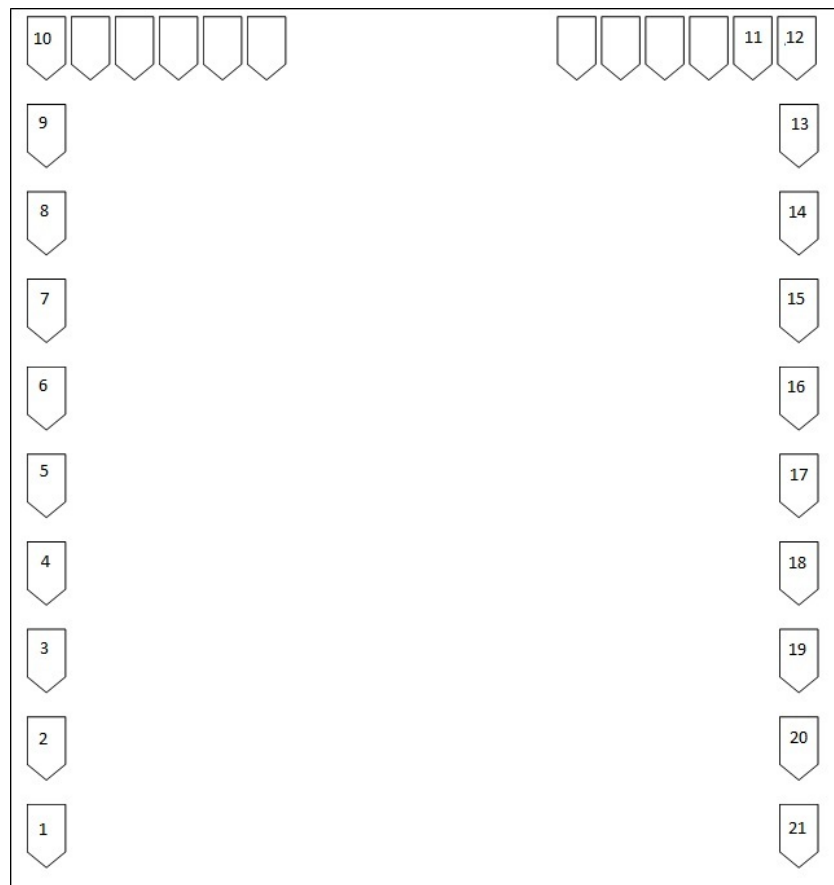
Figure 26. Palazzo Incontri on via de' Servi (Florence).



Figure 27. The former Vespucci property along via di Peretola 8 (Peretola, Florence).



Figure 28. Villa la Sfacciata (via Volterrana, Giogoli, Florence).



1 Sommaia	7 Galilei	13 Borromei	19 Dati
2 Salviati	8 Marzi Medici	14 Del Pace	20 Dati
3 Bonsi	9 Altoviti	15 Carnesecchi	21 Benintendi
4 Bartolini	10 Catastini	16 Del Benini	
5 Alberti	11 Berti	17 Ginori	
6 Benini	12 Grazzini	18 Balducci	

Figure 30. Highlight of the families's coats of arms that frame one of the Vespucci genealogical trees in the *fondo* Pucci (Figure 5). These are some of the families united to the Vespucci through marriages.

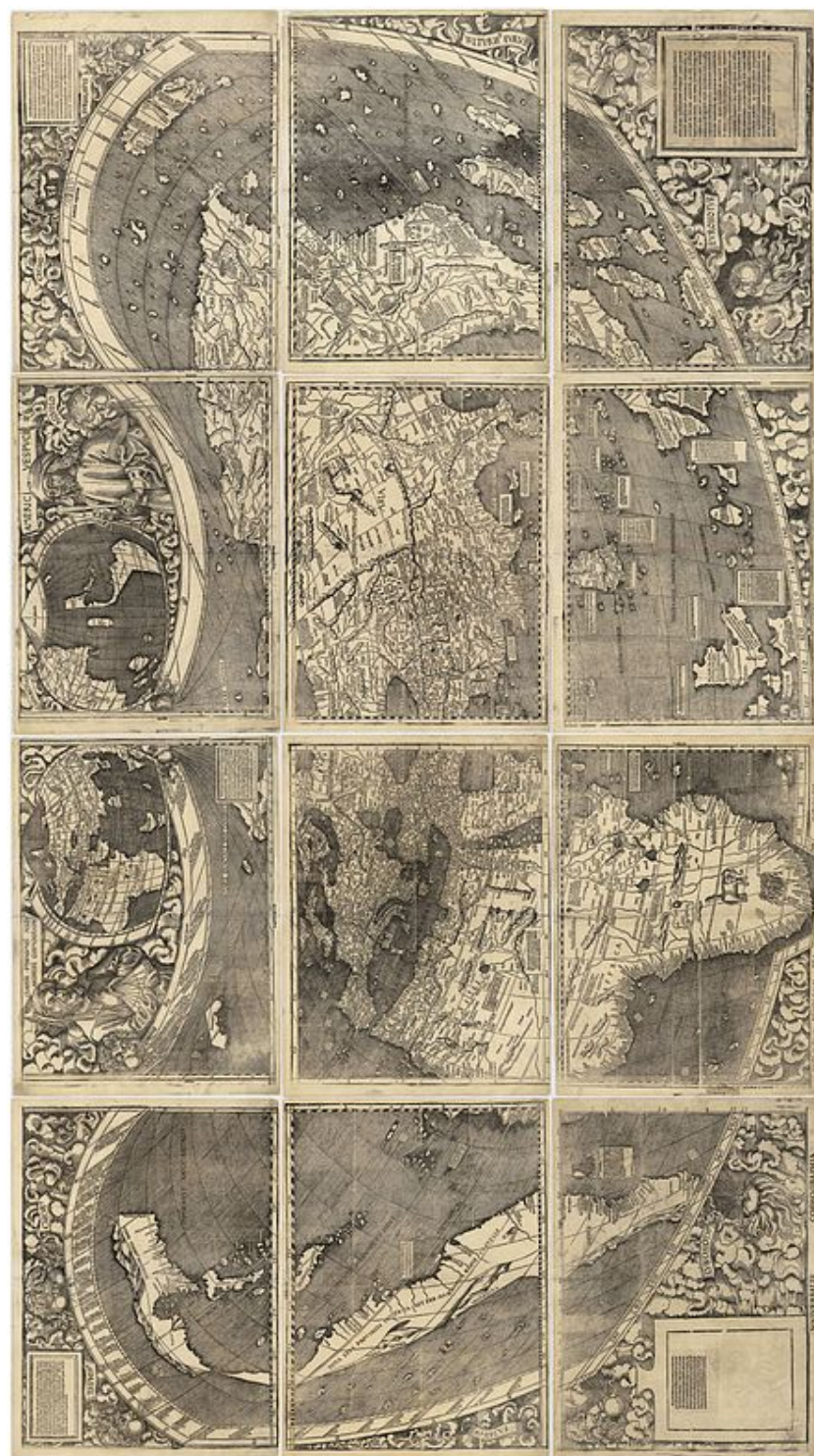


Figure 31. Waldseemüller Map (Washington DC, Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division). 1507. One map on 12 sheets, made from original woodcut.

	Branch 1	Branch 2	Branch 3
1400-1450	<p>Giovanni di Simone : navigator; member of the Buonomini di San Martino; at the court of Alfonso V in Naples</p> <p>Piero di Simone: navigator, travelled to Flanders. Business activity in Bruges</p>	<p>Amerigo Vespucci the Elder: requested in his will to have his family chapel erected in Ognissanti (c. 1472);</p>	<p>Giuliano di Lapo: first <i>gonfaloniere</i> of the Vespucci family; social events held in his house; part of the Medici entourage. Founder of his family chapel in Ognissanti (1476)</p>
1450-1500	<p>Guido Antonio di Giovanni: acquired new properties in the <i>quartieri</i> of San Giovanni and Santa Croce; ambassador on behalf of the Medici.</p> <p>Simone di Giovanni: had a property in Santo Spirito where his son Niccolò, Knight of Malta, lived and where humanists and artists were hosted.</p>	<p>Nastagio di Amerigo: notary and scribe, father of Amerigo the explorer.</p> <p>Giorgio Antonio di Amerigo: humanist; tutor of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de Medici; canon and provost of Santa Maria del Fiore; Dominican friar of San Marco</p>	<p>Piero di Giuliano: Captain of Florentine galleys; married his son Marco with Simonetta Cattaneo from Genoa; close connection with the Medici;</p>

Figure 32. Vespucci generations across the fifteenth century: influential members belonging to the three 'urban' family branches.



Figure 33. The church of Ognissanti (Florence, Borgo Ognissanti).

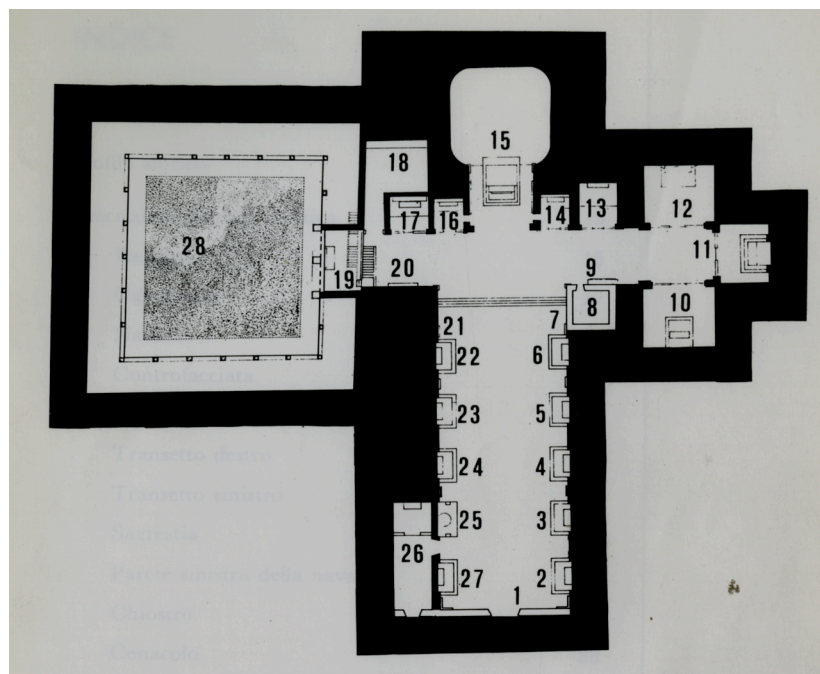


Figure 34. Plan of Ognissanti. The Vespucci chapels are indicated by the number 3 (*Cappella della Misericordia*), 11 (*Cappella del Nome del Gesù*), and 17 (*Cappella del Presepio*) (source: BATAZZI and GIUSTI 1992).



Figure 35. *Cappella del Nome del Gesù*. Line of Simone Vespucci (Florence, Ognissanti - transept).



Figure 36. Simone di Piero Vespucci flat stone marker (Florence, Ognissanti).
[Sepulc[rum]. Simoni Petri de Vespuccio mercatoris ac filiorum et descendendum et
uxoris q[ui] fieri ac pingi fecit totam istam cappellam pro anima sua A. MCCCCLXXVI]



Figure 37. *Cappella del Presepio* (Florence, Ognissanti - transept).



Figure 38. Giuliano Vespucci flat stone marker (Florence, Ognissanti).



Figure 39. *Cappella della Misericordia* (Florence, Ognissanti).



Figure 40. Amerigo di Stagio Vespucci flat stone marker (Florence, Ognissanti).

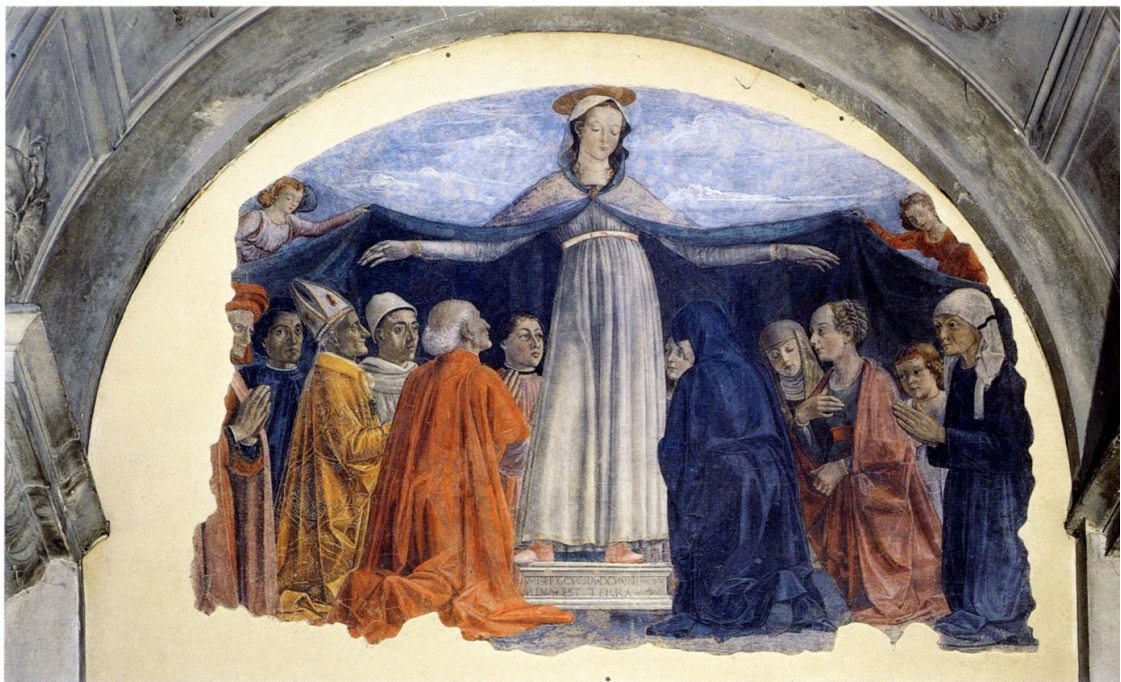


Figure 41. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Madonna della Misericordia* (Florence, Ognissanti). 1473-1476. Detached fresco.

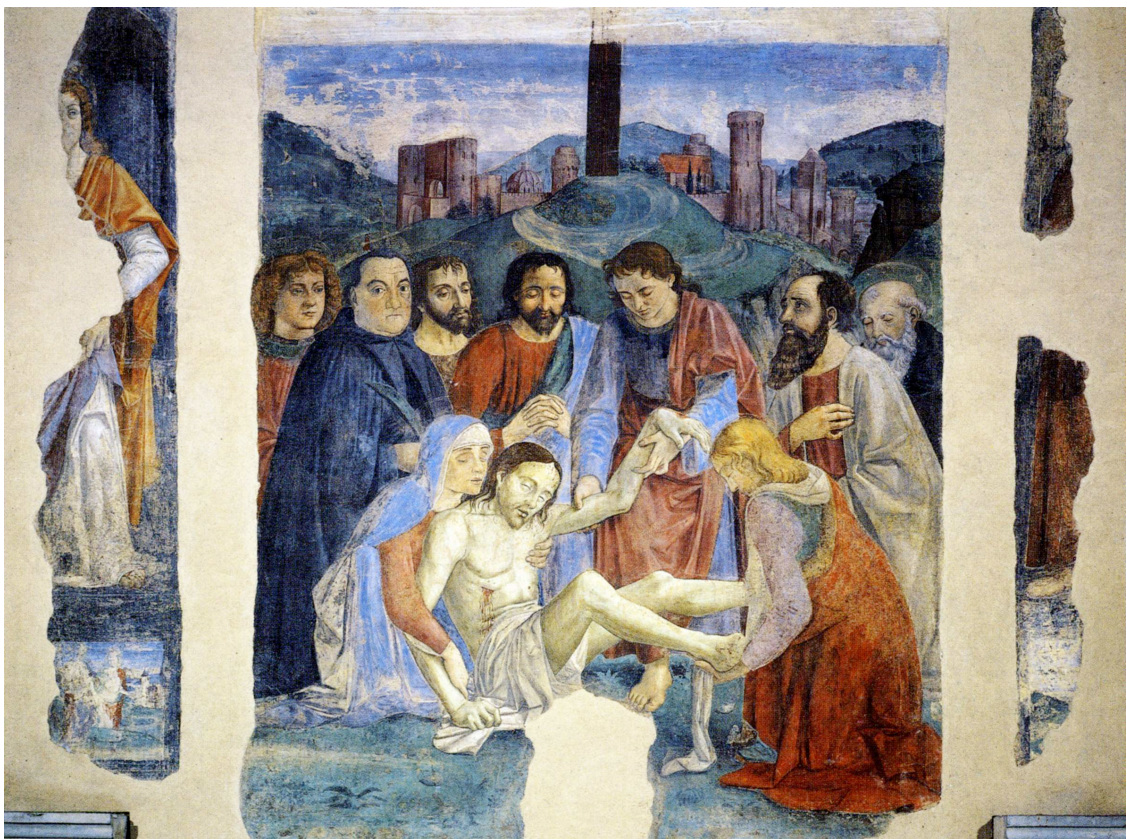


Figure 42. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Deposition* (Florence, Ognissanti) 1473-1476. Detached fresco.



Figure 43. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The funeral of St. Fina* (San Gimignano, Collegiata, chapel of St. Fina) c. 1477-1478. Fresco. Detail of the old lady and her veil.



Figure 44. Unknown Tuscan Painter, *Portrait of Lorenzo Monaco* (Archicenobio dell'Eremo, Camaldoli, Arezzo) 1500s. Oil on panel, 58.6 x 43.3 cm.



Figure 45. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Deposition* (Florence, Ognissanti - refectory) Sinopia. Irregular dimensions. Mounted on canvas.



Figure 46 a-b. Domenico Ghirlandaio, detail of Figure 42. Alesso Baldovinetti's *Elijah* (Florence, San Miniato al Monte. Detail of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal). Fresco.



Figure 47. Piero della Francesca, *Madonna della Misericordia* (Sansepolcro, Pinacoteca Comunale) c.1460-1462. Oil and tempera on panel, 134 x 91 cm.



Figure 48. Anonymous artist, *Madonna della Misericordia* (Milan, Private Collection) c.1450-1470. Tempera on panel, 26.5 x 18 cm.



Figure 49. Giotto, *The Lamentation* (Padua, Scrovegni Chapel) c.1304-1306. Fresco, 200 x 185 cm.



Figure 50. Andrea del Castagno, *Pietà* (Florence, Sant'Apollonia) c. 1448. Fresco, 4.53 x 9.75 m.



Figure 51. Rogier van der Weyden, *Entombment of Christ* (Florence, Uffizi) c. 1463-1464. Oil on panel, 111 x 95 cm.



Figure 52. Dieric Bouts, *Entombment* (London, National Gallery) c. 1450-1455. Tempera on canvas, 87.5 x 73.6 cm.



Figure 53. Rogier van der Weyden (and workshop), *Deposition* (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques) c. 1460. Ink over chalk (leadpoint, charcoal) on paper, 240 x 357 mm. Inv. 20.666.



Figure 54. Andrea del Verrocchio and *bottega*, *The Tornabuoni Relief* (Florence, Bargello) c.1470-1480. Marble. 45.5 x 169.5 cm.



Figure 55. Adriaan Reins (after Memling), *Lamentation* (Bruges, Sint-Janshospital, Memlingmuseum) c. 1480. Oil on panel. Middle Panel: 43.8 x 35.8 cm.

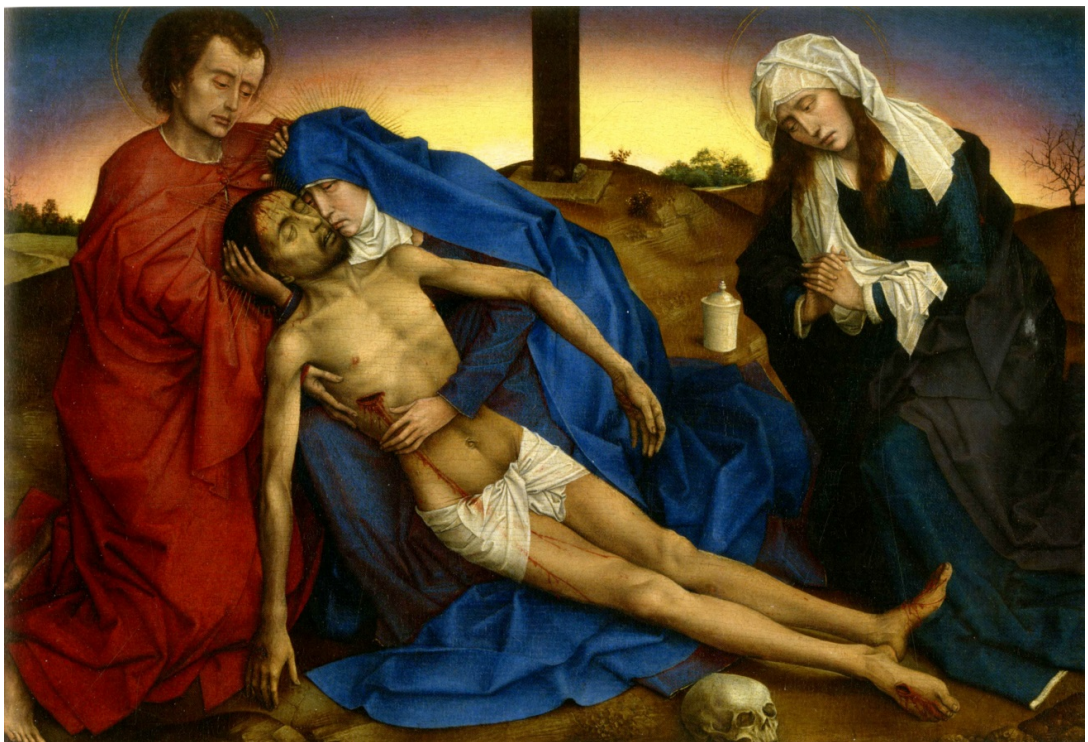


Figure 56. After Rogier van der Weyden, *Deposition* (Brussels, Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium) c. 1441. Oil on panel, 32.5 x 47.2 cm.

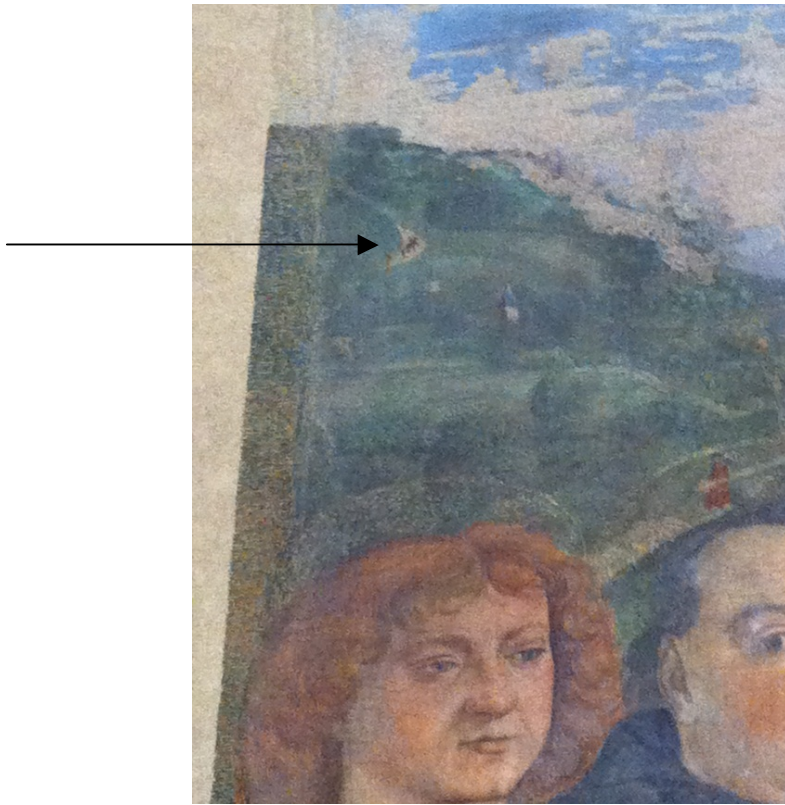


Figure 57. Domenico Ghirlandaio. Detail of Figure 42.

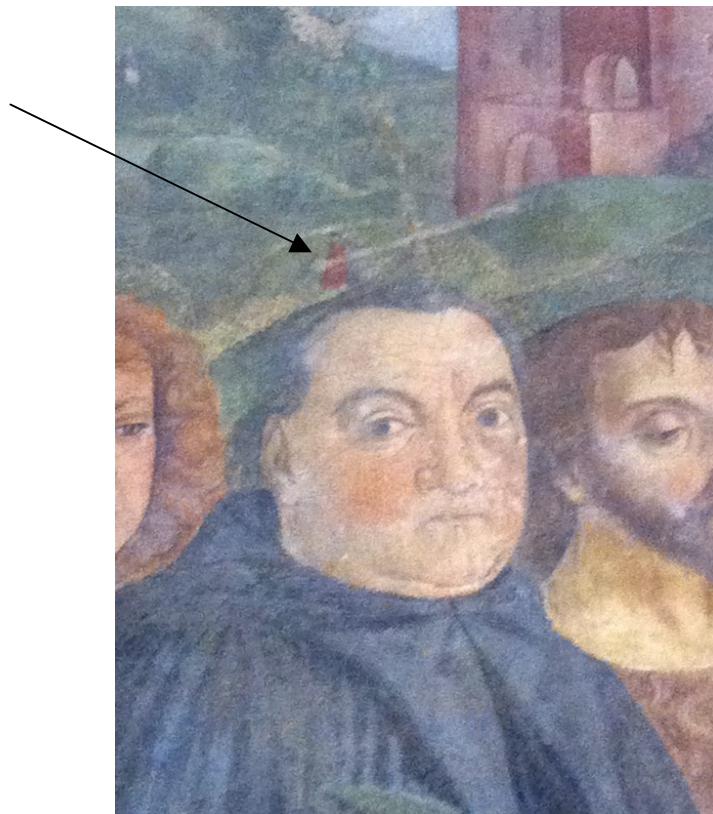


Figure 58. Domenico Ghirlandaio. Detail of Figure 42.

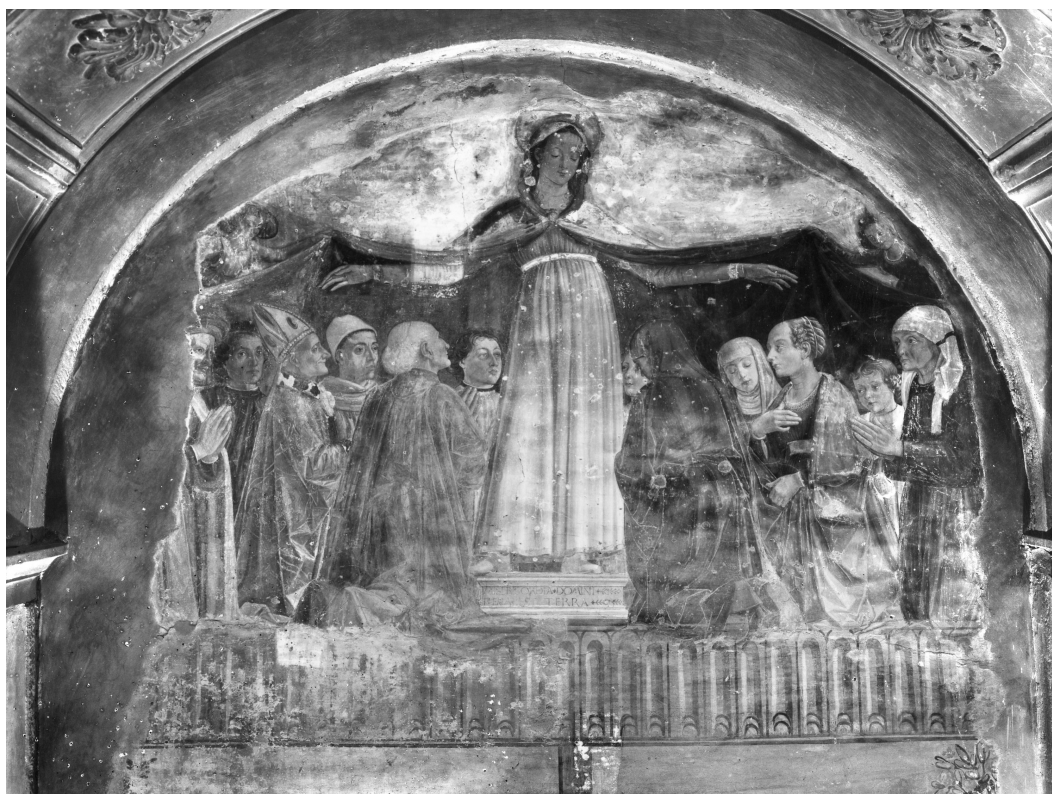


Figure 59. The Vespucci chapel before the restoration works of 1967 (Florence, Opificio delle Pietre Dure).

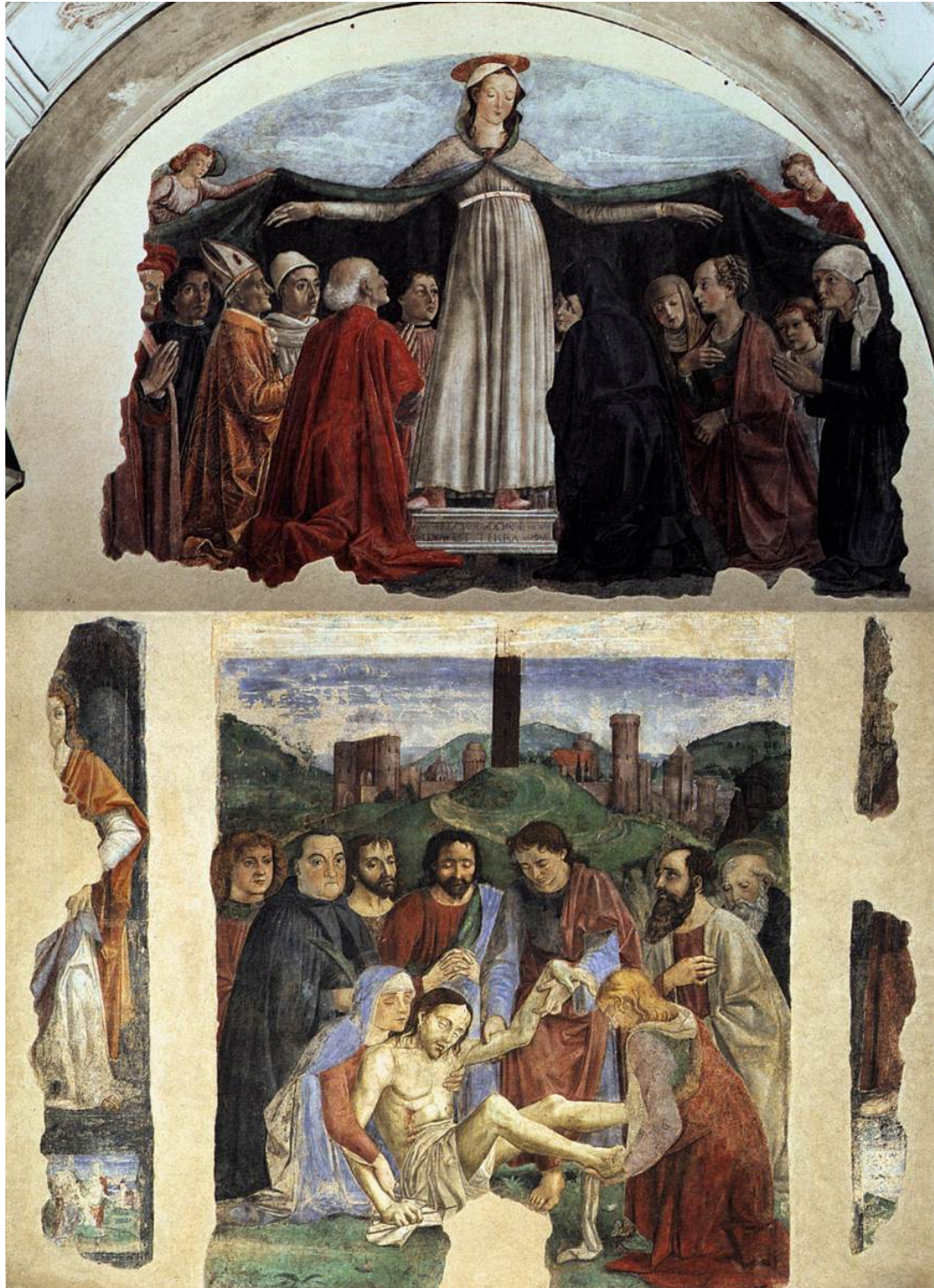


Figure 60. The Vespucci chapel after restoration (Florence, Ognissanti).



Figure 61. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Meeting of Christ and St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness* (Berlin, Staaliche Museen, Gemaldegalerie) 1477-1478. Tempera and oil on panel, 33 x 50.7 cm.



Figure 62. Andrea del Verrocchio, *Baptism of Christ* (Florence, Uffizi) 1472-1475. Tempera and oil on panel, 180 x 152 cm.



Figure 63. Pietro Perugino, *Adoration of the Magi* (Perugia, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria) 1470s. Oil on panel, 242 x 180 cm.

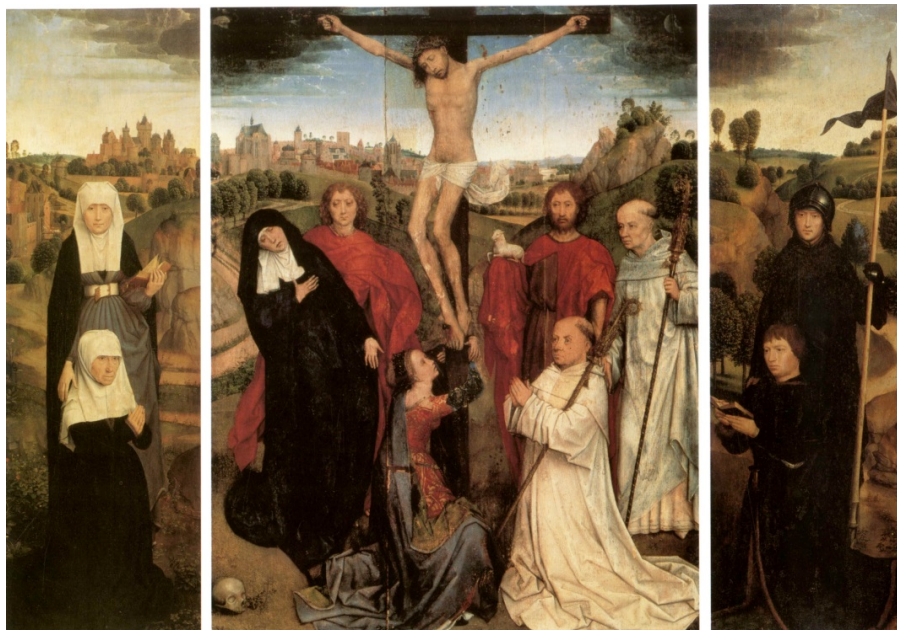


Figure 64. Hans Memling, *Crucifixion* (Vicenza, Museo Civico – middle panel) c. 1460-1470. Oil on panel, 78 x 63 cm.



Figure 65. The remaining columns of San Pier Scheraggio (Florence, via della Ninna).



Figure 66. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule* (Florence, Santa Trinita) c. 1485-1490. Fresco. Dimension of the chapel: 3.71 x 5.23 cm. Detail of San Pier Scheraggio.

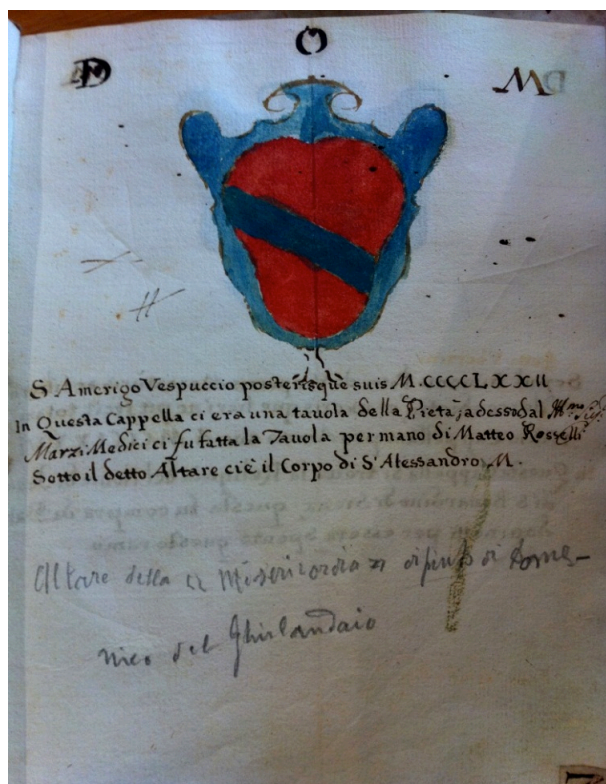


Figure 67 Sepoluario 220bis (Florence, Archivio Storico della Provincia San Francesco Stigmatizzato).



Figure 68. Filippino Lippi, Altar wall of the Carafa Chapel (Rome, Santa Maria Sopra Minerva) c. 1504. Fresco. Dimension of the wall: 711.6 x 111 cm.

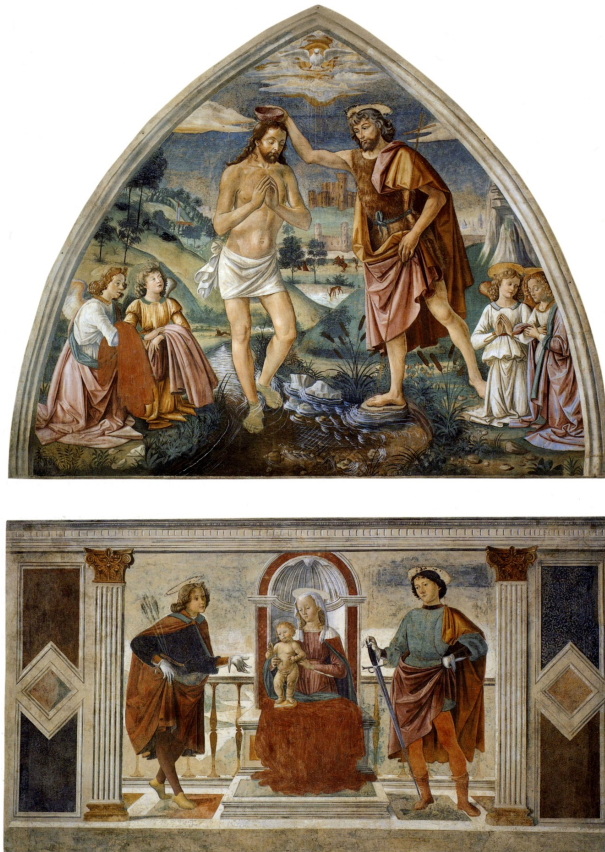


Figure 69. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Baptism of Christ and Virgin and Child enthroned with Saints* (San Andrea in Brozzi, San Donnino) c. 1468-1470. Fresco.

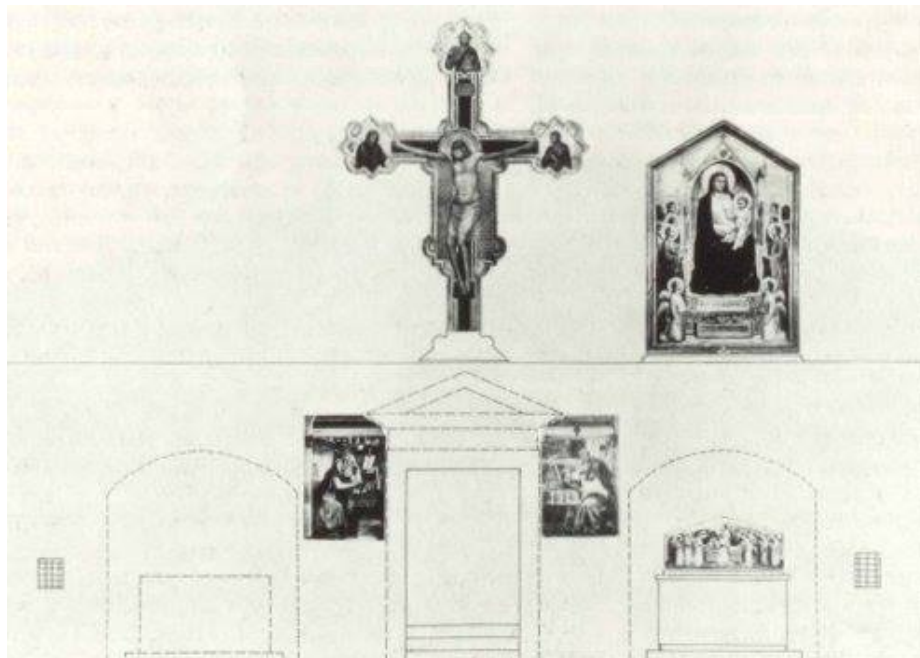


Figure 70. Irene Hueck's reconstruction of the *tramezzo* of Ognissanti (source: HUECK 1992, 46).



Figure 71. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *St. Jerome* (Florence, Ognissanti) 1480. Fresco, 184 x 119 cm.



Figure 72. Sandro Botticelli, *St. Augustine* (Florence, Ognissanti) 1480. Fresco, 185 x 123 cm.



Figure 73. Tommaso Finiguerra, Alesso Baldovinetti, Giuliano da Maiano, *Sacresty of the Masses*. East Wall (Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore) c.1460. Intarsia.



Figure 74. Del Francione on design of Botticelli, Dante and Petrarch carved on one of the doors of the Hall of Lilies (Florence, Palazzo Vecchio) c. 1480. Intarsia.



Figure 75. Sandro Botticelli, *Transfiguration with St. Augustine and St. Jerome* (Rome, Galleria Pallavicini) c. 1500. Tempera on panel. Left wing: 27 x 7.5 cm. Central panel: 27.2 x 19.4 cm. Right wing: 27.1 x 8.4 cm.



Figure 76. Van Eyckian image of *St. Jerome* (Detroit, Institute of Art). c. 1442. Oil on parchment on oak panel, 20 x 12.5 cm.



Figure 77. Detail of Figure 72. The monastic clock.



Figure 78. Reconstruction of an astronomic clock realised by Lorenzo dalla Volpaia (Florence, Museo Galilei).

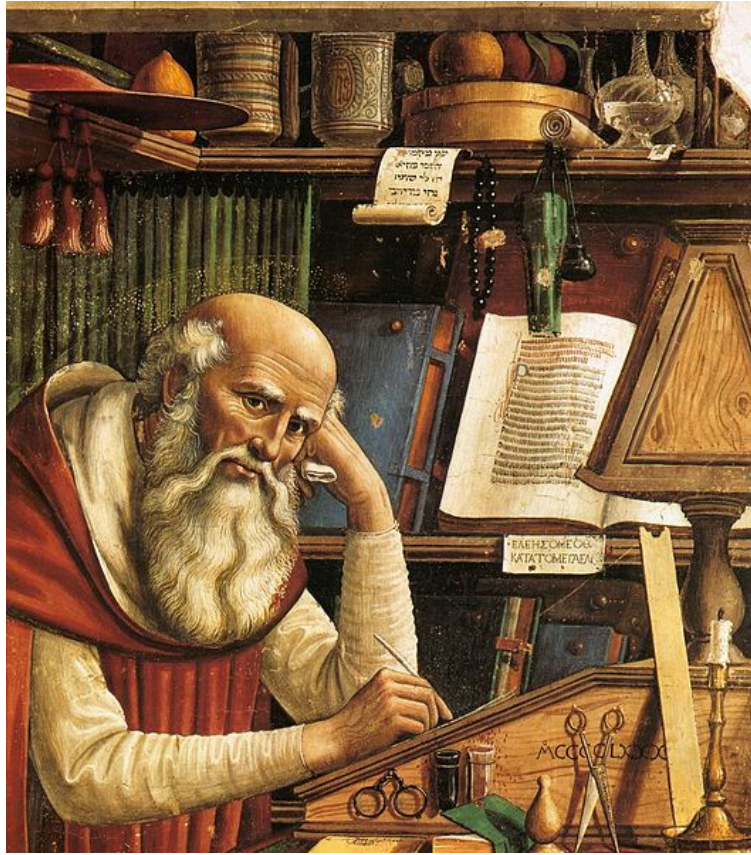


Figure 79. Detail of Figure 71. Image of the various objects represented in the *studiolo*.



Figure 80. *Albarello* (Montelupo, Museum of Montelupo) c. 1450-1470. Majolica.



Figure 81. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of John the Baptist* (Florence, Santa Maria Novella, Tornabuoni chapel) c. 1485-1490. Fresco. Detail of the *albarello* placed above the bed.



Figure 82. Plate with the IHR monogram. (Florence, Bargello Museum) second half of the fifteenth century. Diameter 46.5 cm.



Figure 83. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni* (Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid) 1488-1490. Mixed technique on panel. 77 x 49 cm. Detail of the rosary beads.



Figure 84. *Rivet Bone/Antler or Ivory Spectacle Frame*, late 15th century, found in Florence (Soprintendenza Archeologica per la Toscana, Florence).



Figure 85. Sandro Botticelli, *Mars and Venus* (London, National Gallery). 1477-1478. Tempera on panel, 69.2 x 173. 4 cm.



Figure 86. Detail of Figure 85. The flying wasps.



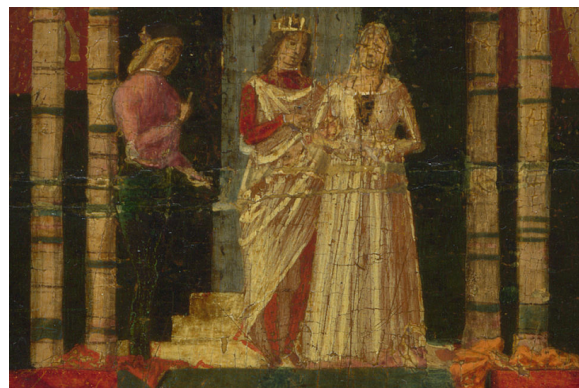
Figure 87. Medicean manuscript (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Plut. 53.2, f.5r.)
c. 1474. 264 x 177 mm. Detail.



Figure 88. Detail of Figure 31. The wasp.



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Figures 89. Sandro Botticelli, *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* (Madrid, Prado) c. 1482-1483. Tempera on panel, 84 x 142 cm. Detail of the bride and the chest brooch.

Figure 90. Domenico Morone, *Rape of the Sabine women after the signal* (London, National Gallery) c.1490. Tempera on panel, 45.4 x 49.2 cm. Detail of the couple.



Figure 91. Piero di Cosimo, *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints* (Florence, Museo dell' Ospedale degli Innocenti) c. 1493. Oil and tempera on panel, 203 x 197 cm. Detail of St. Catherine and the shoulder brooch.



Figure 92. Sandro Botticelli, *The Primavera* (Florence, Uffizi) c. 1477-1482. Tempera on poplar, 203 x 314 cm. Detail of the three Graces.



Figure 93. Andrea del Verrocchio, *Female Head* (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques) 1470s. Metalpoint on rose prepared paper, 26.7 x 22.5 cm. Inv. 18965.

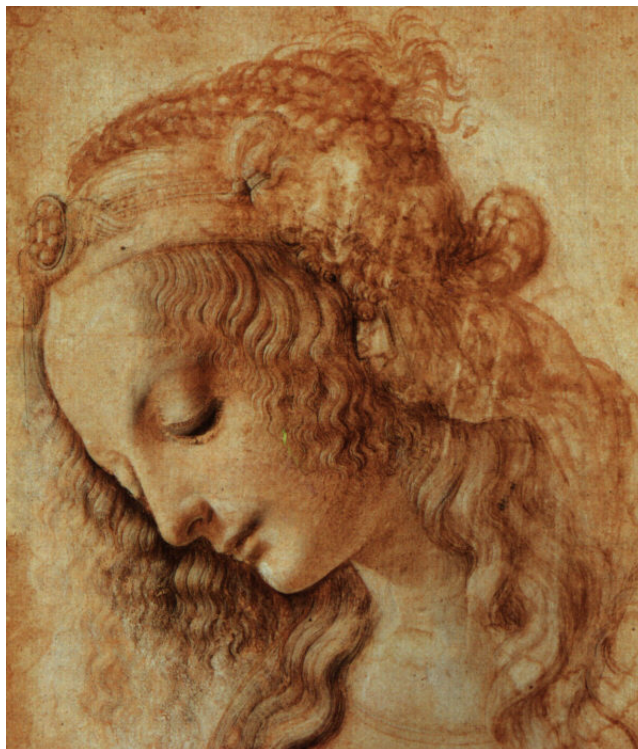


Figure 94. Leonardo da Vinci, *Head of a woman looking down* (Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe) c. 1468-1475. Black chalk or leadpoint, brown and grey-black wash, heightened with lead white, 28 x 20 cm. Inv. 428 E.



Figures 95-96. Silk velvet textile brocaded with metal threads. Italy 1470-1530 (London, Victoria and Albert Museum) and detail of Figure 85.



Figure 97. Detail of Figure 85. Baby satyrs, lance, and shell.



Figure 98. Martinus Opifex "Achille's scores" from *Historia Troiana*, c.1450. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna. Cod. 2773, fol. 164r.



Figure 99. Detail of Figure 85. Baby satyr and fruit.



Figure 100. Sandro Botticelli, *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* (Madrid, Prado) c.1482-1483. Tempera on panel, 84 x 142 cm. Detail of the banquet table.



Figure 101. *De Viribus Herbarum* MS 592, f. 79v (Bergamo, Biblioteca Angelo Mai). First half of the fifteenth century. Representation of the squirting cucumber.



Figure 102. Giovan Francesco Penni, *Mercury and Psyche* (Rome, Villa Farnesina. Loggia di Psyche) c. 1520s. Fresco. Detail of the festoon and squirting cucumber.



Figure 103. The display of *Mars and Venus* at the National Gallery of London.



Figure 104. *Lettuccio* (Sarasota, John and Mable Ringling Museum) c. 1508.
Carved, gilded and inlaid walnut.



Figure 105. Detail of Figure 85. Baby satyr and the sallet.



Figure 106. Sallet (Brescia, Museo delle Armi Luigi Marzoli) c. 1470-1480. Steel, 27 cm. Inv. E 32.



Figure 107. Stone sarcophagus with relief, *Bacchus discovering Ariadne at Naxos* (Vatican, Vatican Museum). Greek. Detail of the top left corner of the frontal stone panel.



Figure 108. Unknown craftsman, *Mirror Frame* (London, Victoria and Albert Museum) 1470s. Painted and gilded stucco in a gilt wood frame, 5.5 x 64.2 x 50.8 cm.



Figure 109. Andrea del Verrocchio, *Sleeping Youth* (Berlin, Staatliche Museen) 1470s.
Unpainted terracotta, 36 x 58 cm.



Figure 110. Andrea Pisano, *The Creation of Eve* (Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo)
c.1334-1437. Marble, 83 x 69 cm.

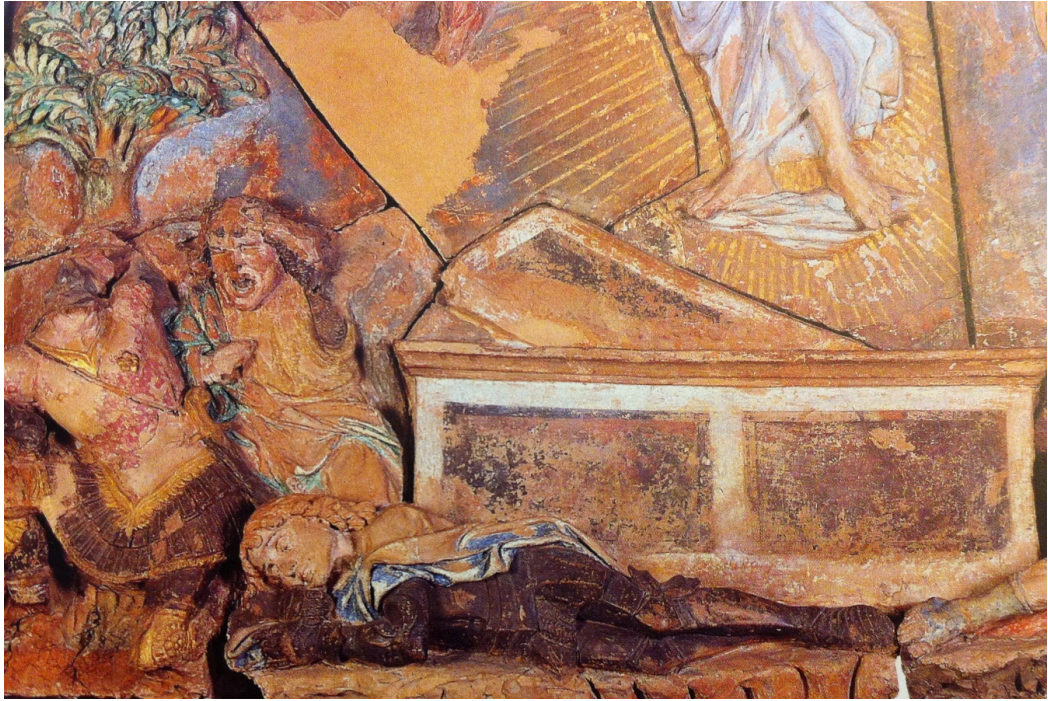


Figure 111. Andrea del Verrocchio, *The Resurrection* (Florence, Bargello Museum) 1470s.
Painted terracotta, 135 x 150 cm.

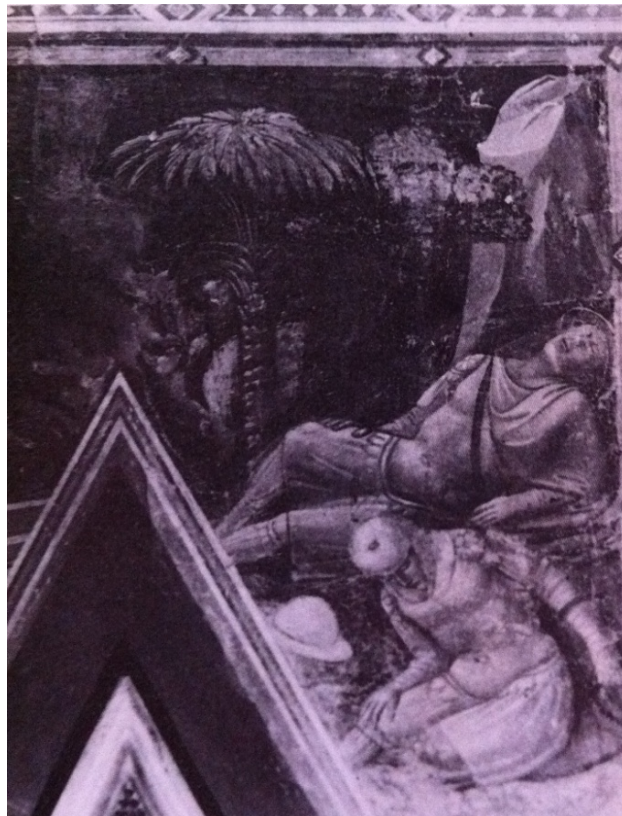


Figure 112. Taddeo Gaddi, *The Resurrection* (Florence, Santa Croce. Cappella Baroncelli)
c.1328-1334. Fresco.



Figure 113. Andrea di Bonaiuto, *The Resurrection* (Florence, Cappellone degli Spagnoli. Santa Maria Novella) c. 1365-1367. Fresco.



Figure 114. Lorenzo Ghiberti, *The Resurrection* (Florence, North Baptistery Door) c. 1403-1424. Gilded bronze, 52 x 45 cm.



Figure 115. Luca della Robbia, *The Resurrection* (Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore. New Sacresty lunette). c. 1442-1445. Glazed and polychrome terracotta, 200 x 265 cm.



Figure 116 a-b. Trajan and the Dacians. Comparison between the Roman relief of the Trajan's Column (II A.D, east side) and a drawing c. 1460 (Milan, Ambrosiana Library). Figure b: *verso*, silver point, brown ink on paper, 212 x 310 mm. (Milan, Ambrosiana). Inv.F. 237. Inf. 1687-1688 (now F. 214 inf.31).



Figure 117. Casket with lovers around the lock (Cluny, Paris Musée du Moyen Age) fourteenth century. Leather, 12.5 x 26 x 18.5 cm.

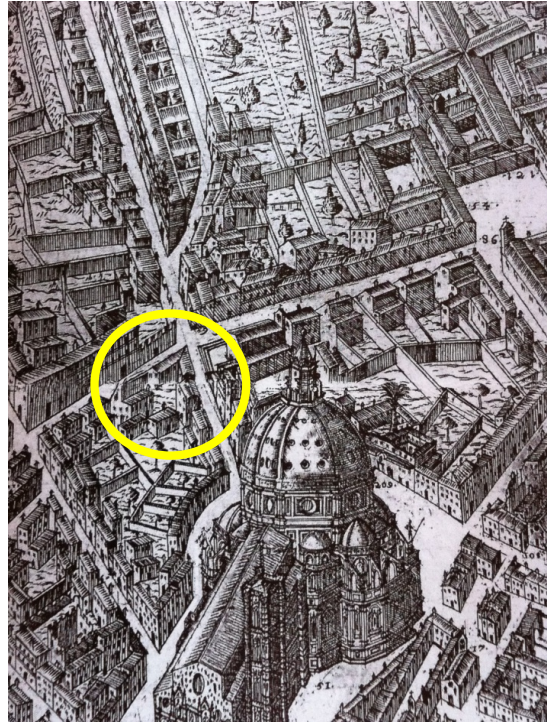


Figure 118. Stefano Buonsignori, *Map of Florence* (Florence, Museo di Firenze com'era). Detail of the *quartiere* of San Giovanni. 1583-1584. Ink on paper, 143 x 131 cm. In the circle: the site of the Vespucci property along via de' Servi.

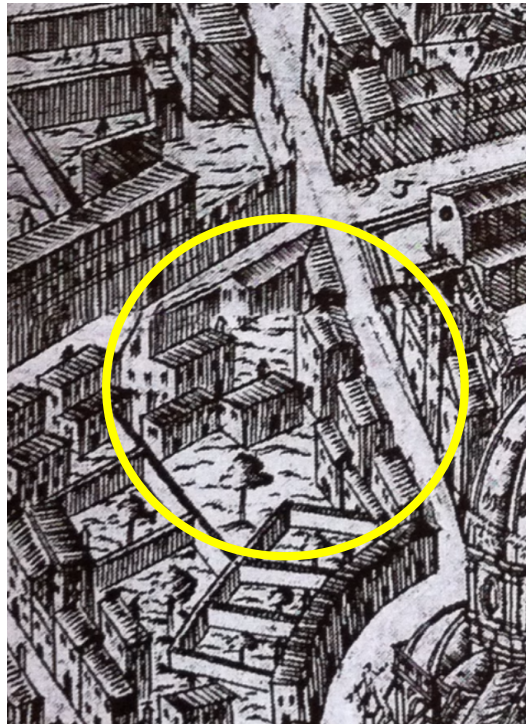


Figure 119. Stefano Buonsignori, *Map of Florence* (Florence, Museo di Firenze com'era). Detail of the *quartiere* of San Giovanni. 1583-1584. Ink on paper, 143 x 131 cm. In the circle: via de' Servi and the site of the former Vespucci property.



Figure 120. Piero di Cosimo, *The Discovery of Honey* (Worcester Art Museum, Worcester) c. 1499-1500. Oil on panel, 79.2 x 128.5 cm.



Figure 121. Piero di Cosimo, *The Misfortune of Silenus* (Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge) c. 1499-1500.
Oil on panel, 80 x 129.7 cm.



Figure 122. Piero di Cosimo, *The Hunt* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) c. 1485-1500. Oil and tempera on panel, 70.5 x 169.5 cm.



Figure 123. Piero di Cosimo, *The Return from the Hunt* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) c. 1485-1500. Oil and tempera on panel, 70.5 x 168.9 cm.



Figure 124. Piero di Cosimo, *The Forest Fire* (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum) c.1495-1505. Oil on panel, 71.2 x 202 cm.



Figure 125. Piero di Cosimo, *The Battle of Lapith and Centaurs* (London, The National Gallery) c. 1500-1510. Oil on poplar panel, 71 x 260 cm.

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Figure 126. Piero di Cosimo, *Tritons and Nereids* (Pesaro, Altomani & Co) c. 1499-1500. Tempera on panel, 37 x 158 cm.

Figure 127. Piero di Cosimo, *Tritons and Nereids* (Washington DC, Sydney J. Freedberg Collection) c. 1499-1500. Tempera on panel, 37 x 158 cm.



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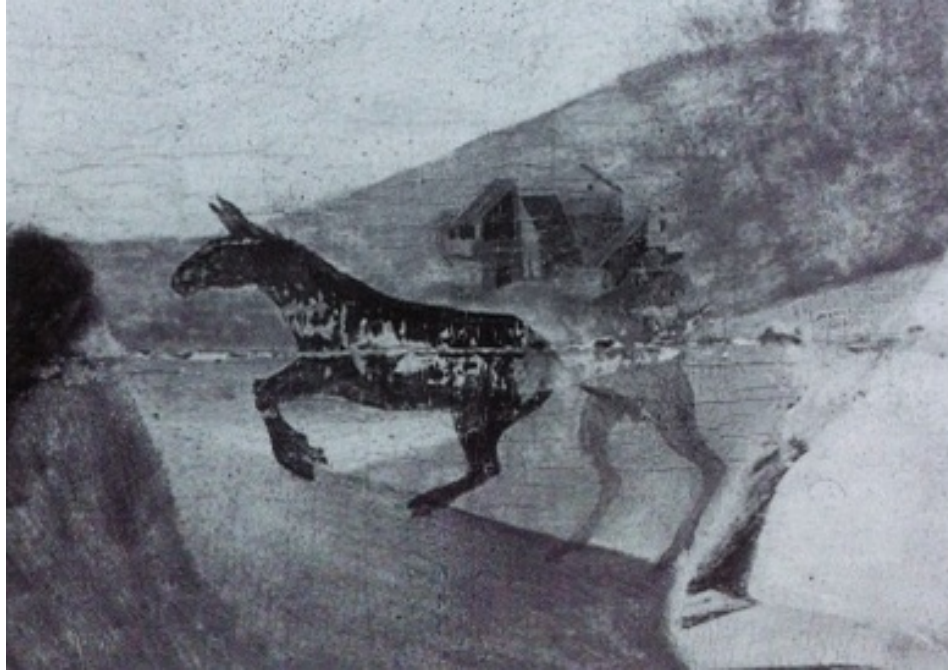


Figure 128. Infrared reflectography image of Piero di Cosimo's *Misfortune of Silenus* (source: GERONIMUS 2006, 104).



Figure 129. Unknown illustrator, *Columbus's first Voyage to the New World*. Florence 1493 frontispiece (London, British Library). Shelfmark IA.27709. Woodcut. Detail.



Figure 130. Giuliano da Sangallo, *Fireplace with marine figures* (Florence, Palazzo Gondi)
c.1490s. Marble.



Figure 131. Gherardesca Palace's courtyard (Florence).



Figure 132. Filippino Lippi, *Wounded Centaur* (Oxford, Christ Church) c.1480-1500. Oil and tempera on panel, 77 x 68 cm.



Figure 133. Sandro Botticelli, *Minerva and the Centaur* (Florence, Uffizi) c. 1482-1483. Egg tempera on canvas, 207 x 148 cm.



Figure 134. Sandro Botticelli, *Calumny of Apelles* (Florence, Uffizi) c. 1494-1495. Tempera on panel, 62 x 91 cm. Detail of the architecture.



Figure 135. Sandro Botticelli, Drawing for the *Divina Commedia*. Inferno XII (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana). Reginense lat. 1896, c.103r. c.1490s. Detail of the centaur on the bottom left side of the drawing.



Figure 136. Sandro Botticelli, Drawing for the *Divina Commedia*. Purgatorio 1, (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett) Botticelli/cod. Hamilton 201, verso. c.1490s. Detail of the figures on the bottom left side of the drawing.



Figure 137. Albrecht Dürer, *Rape of Europa* (Vienna, Albertina) c. 1494-1495.
Pen and ink on paper, 28.9 x 41.7 cm. Inv. 3062.



Figure 138. *The Genoese Map* (Florence, BNCF, Portolano 1) c.1457.



Figure 139. Jacopo de' Barbari, *Map of Venice* (Venice, Museo Correr) c. 1500. Woodcut, 135 x 282 cm. Detail of Neptune.

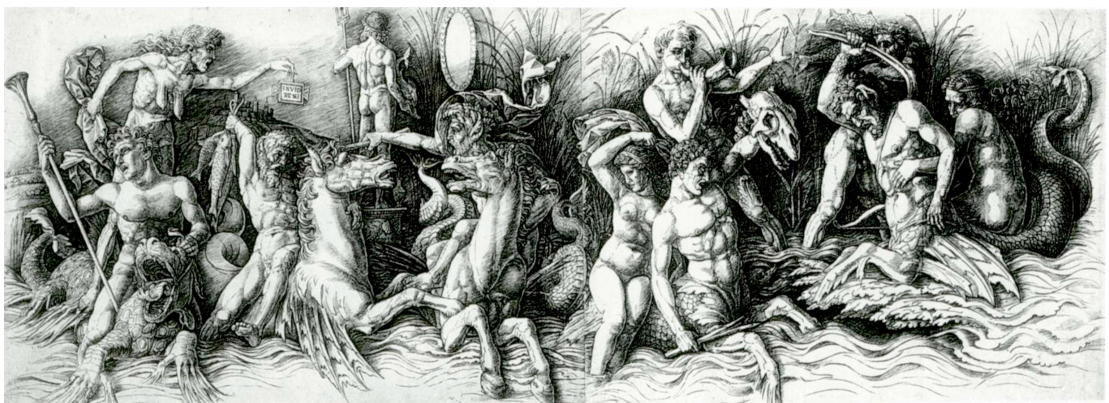


Figure 140. Andrea Mantegna, *Fighting of the Sea Gods* (Chatsworth, Devonshire Collection and the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees) before 1481. Engraving, 283 x 826 mm.



Figure 141. Sandro Botticelli, *The Story of Virginia* (Bergamo, Accademia Carrara) c. 1499-1500. Tempera on panel, 86 x 165 cm.



Figure 142. Sandro Botticelli, *The Story of Lucretia* (Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum) c. 1499-1500. Tempera and oil on panel, 83.5 x 180 cm.



Figure 143. Sandro Botticelli, *Martyrdom of St. Lucy* (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques) c. 1490-1500. Pen and brown ink, brown wash, heightened with white gouache, on white paper. Mounted in full, 222 x 360 mm. Inv. 1224.



Figure 144. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Birth of the Virgin* (Florence, Santa Maria Novella, Tornabuoni Chapel) c. 1485-1490. Fresco.



Figure 145. Detail of Figure 141. The central scene.



Figure 146. Detail of Figure 142. The column surmounted by the statue of the David.



Figure 147. Filippino Lippi, *Erato* (Berlin, Staatliche Museen Gemaldegalerie) c. 1504.
Tempera on panel, 61 x 51 cm.